THE STORY OF

A. Reaux

AND THE EARLY DAYS OF THE BUSINESS HE FOUNDED

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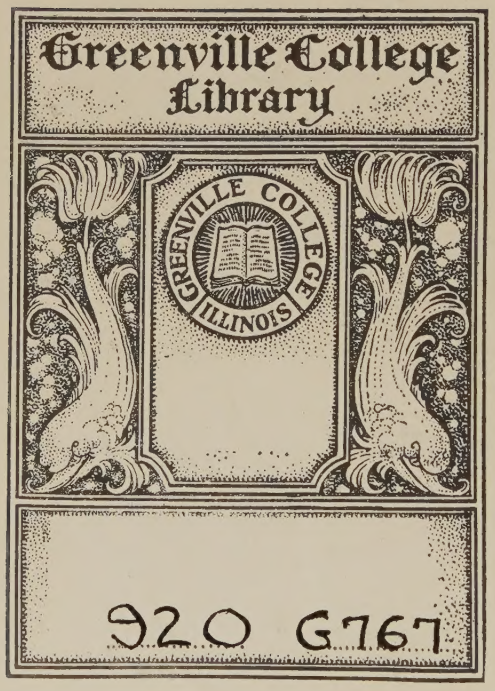
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WILLIAM THOMAS GRANT opened the first W. T. Grant store in Lynn, Massachusetts on December 6, 1906. . . . He presided at the opening of the 500th Grant store at Levittown, Pennsylvania, on September 23, 1953, marking the beginning of a new chapter in the company's program of expansion. . . . This is the story of his start in life and the early days of the unique business he founded, as told to his long-time neighbor and friend G. LYNN SUMNER.

Sumner, Gee Lynn

THE STORY OF
W. T. GRANT
AND THE EARLY DAYS OF THE BUSINESS HE FOUNDED

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Her people had been prosperous farmers in New Jersey and her parents owned a farm near Somerville. Some of the happiest recollections of my childhood are of visits to that farm. Once every two years when we lived in Malden, Massachusetts, we would make the trip. (I suspect that my grandparents had sent money for the fare.) We would go by train to Fall River, then by boat to New York, then across the Desbrosses Street ferry to Hoboken and by train to Somerville. It was a great event in our lives.

Even now those days are vivid with memories of horses, pigs and chickens; of getting lost in the corn field; of searching for eggs in the barn; of following my father through the woods when he went hunting for rabbits and squirrels and quail; of watching with wide-eyed wonder the threshing of the wheat, a horse pacing its plodding steps on a treadmill to power the machine.

My Aunt Essie worked in a general store in Somerville, and when we would go into town and see her there handling merchandise and waiting on customers, it seemed to me that she had the most interesting job in the world. What heaven it would be to work in a store!

It was in my sixth year that we moved from Fall River to Malden. There were four in our family—my father, mother, my older brother, Elihu, who was then nine, and myself. When I was ten years old a sister was born and that made five.

During the years we lived in Malden there was never a time when the family income was sufficient to give my mother any sense of security. My father's earnings continued to be small and uncertain and frequently interrupted. Yet when he would lose one job and go searching for another, he was always the radiant optimist. Shining success was always just around the corner.

Many times we had to move to a home where rent was lower. To my mother, every penny that came to her hands was to be hoarded and used with care. It is no wonder that under such circumstances I started when very young to earn a little money as a help to my mother. It proved to be a great spur to my initiative and ingenuity. I soon found that I loved to sell things.

When I was seven I began earning pennies running errands for people, and when I was eight I got what might be considered my first job. There was a little old man known as Johnny Yiyi who operated a butter and egg wagon in our town and my mother was one of his customers. He was a quaint character, only a little over four feet tall, with round red cheeks and shining eyes, a bald head and fluffy mutton-chop whiskers. My job was to ride with him and hold the reins of the horse while he went into houses to sell his butter and eggs. My compensation was unpredictable, for he paid me either seven or nine or eleven cents a week —never more and never anything but an odd number of pennies.

My mother figured that this was all right for the first few weeks, when I was serving a sort of apprenticeship, but when the practice continued for a longer period, her sense of justice was outraged. She decided to get even with "old skin-flint," as she called him, for his shameful treatment of her boy, and proceeded to do so by refusing to pay him an 89-cent bill for butter. That was the end of my first job; but it was not the end of the story.

Twenty-two years later, after I had opened my first store in Lynn, Massachusetts, I looked up one day to see Johnny Yiyi standing in the doorway. He was more wrinkled and seemed tinier than when I had last seen him in those far-away days, and his mutton-chop whiskers were now snowy white. I was so glad to see him that I rushed out and put my arms around his shoulders. I started to tell him all about my wonderful store, and I was so proud of it that I am sure I must have sounded very boastful. I would have gone on talking to him for hours, had he not interrupted me.

"Yes, yes, Mr. Grant," he said, "and now that you are so successful, maybe you would like to take care of a little bill that your mother has owed me for a long time." Reaching into an inside pocket he handed me the 22-year-old bill for 89 cents for butter.

My cordial reunion with Johnny Yiyi ended right there. The next time I saw my mother I told her about my caller and she exclaimed, "You didn't give him the money, did you?" I confessed that I had and I think she was more upset than she had been 22 years before. Though she lived to be 90, I don't think she ever quite forgave Johnny Yiyi for outwitting her.

I can only say that Johnny Yiyi and I had each held firm to a purpose, and both of us had won. Over the years he had clung doggedly to his determination to collect his bill, and I to my dream of having a store of my own. Now 22 years after I had scrambled down from the seat of that butter-and-egg wagon for the last time, he had his 89 cents and I had my store!

CHAPTER 2

"I Liked To Sell"

Yes, this is really me! I was about 15 or 16 at the time, and needless to say, I thought I was pretty "Hot Stuff."

Honors come to a man, some earned, some bestowed. I have had my share of both. I remember my thoughts when I was receiving an honorary degree from Bates College in Maine, along with Ambassador Austin of the United Nations. Sitting up there on the chapel platform in cap and gown, I smiled to myself. Honorary degrees as such meant little to me at this time.

Had such an honor come twenty years earlier, I might have strutted a little and boasted about it. But now I was thinking that it would be far more appropriate if I were giving some sort of degree to Bates and to other colleges in Maine for the fine young men who had come out of those schools to join the Grant organization and rise to high executive positions in our company.

I also thought what a travesty it was that I should be honored by any educational institution, for I did not get my education out of school or books. I managed to get as far as the second year in the Malden high school, but only because for some reason my teachers seemed to like me in spite of my lagging interest in my lessons.

I was never a good student. My record was in sharp contrast to that of my brother Elihu, who was a brilliant student, the valedictorian of his class, and who went on to become a minister and, in later years, a distinguished archeologist and a professor at both Smith and Haverford College.

From my first years in school I found it easier to learn by experience. Never shall I forget a Mrs. Bruce who came to primary grades in our school once or twice a year to tell stories to us children. Some of those stories made such an impression on me that I can remember them now, almost word for word. Every one of them held a simple, practical lesson in successful living, so basic, so apt, that it helped later to shape my thinking in the conduct of my business affairs.

Above all, I learned by doing. Perhaps the experiences that meant more to me in after life than all I learned from books were gained in selling. After school, on Saturdays, and during vacations I sold everything I could get hold of that could be sold by a boy in our Malden neighborhood.

As soon as I was big enough to carry newspapers I had a route, delivering the *Boston Globe, Herald, Post* and *Transcript* to my customers. Also, I sold the *Malden Evening Mail* on the streets at one cent a copy. One-half of each cent was mine to keep.

I sold small packages of bluing from house to house. That was good for a few cents a week the year 'round. Then there were the seasonal jobs. For example, in the winter I'd hire myself out to shovel snow from the neighbors' sidewalks.

In the spring I had quite a bonanza selling flower seeds at double the cost. At Breck's in Boston, I would buy small packets of seeds for 2½ cents and sell them for 5 cents, and buy larger packets for 5 cents and sell them for 10 cents. The manager of the Breck store, impressed with my enterprise as a seed salesman, told me one day that if I ever wanted a regular job when I got a little older I should come and see him.

Decoration Day brought a special opportunity for enterprise and profit, for I would buy flowers and potted plants and sell them at the cemetery entrance.

Selling always had a fascination for me. Much as I liked to play baseball, no ball game was important enough to interfere with the chance to sell something. And the need for money at home was urgent. So I seized upon every opportunity to sell, and was able to make a contribution to the family purse and to help buy my clothes.

When school closed I was eager to get a summer job. One of my first was in Morgan's Drug Store in Malden, where I worked at the soda fountain for $2.00 a week. Before the first week was over I accidentally broke a section of the marble top of the fountain when I was filling it with ice. It cost $3.00 to replace it and Mr. Morgan promptly let me know that the money would come out of my pay as a penalty for my carelessness. So I had to work two full weeks before I collected my first dollar.

Another vacation I worked in the Billings Shoe Store in Malden. Here I ran errands and learned to repair shoes. Sometimes when Mr. Billings had to go out of the store he would let me sell. That made up for all the hours I spent on tedious jobs.

The summer I was 13 I went to the manager of Breck's seed store and reminded him of his promise. He couldn't give me a job at the time, but on the strength of a letter from him, I got another summer job at $2.50 a week as errand boy for three Boston lawyers who had an office together at 5 Tremont Street in Boston. The small wage didn't leave me much after paying carfare from Malden to Boston and back every day, but the new job promised excitement.

All three lawyers—Chester M. Perry, Arthur J. Selfridge, and George R. Jones—had their desks in one room. There were no private offices, but Mr. Perry's desk was partitioned off in the corner from the other two. There were other lawyers, some of them famous in their day, with offices in that same building: Sherman Whipple, Thomas Savage, the Pastene Brothers, John D. Long, who later became Secretary of the Navy in President McKinley's cabinet—these and many more.

In my employers' office we had no telephones, no typists or secretaries. All letters were handwritten. One of my jobs was to make copies of these letters by putting them between pages in a big copy book with a damp blotting paper, then putting the whole thing into a letter press, the pressure of which would make the duplicates on the tissue-paper pages.

I took the place of a telephone, not only by running errands for the three lawyers in our office but for several others on the floor. And we all seemed to do all right—without telephones, typewriters and a lot of other paraphernalia that have become so necessary a part of today's offices.

At the end of my first week in the law offices, I received my $2.50 and had but one great desire and that was to hurry home and show it to my mother. I remember that I put the money in my pocket, ran down the stairs, ran through Scollay Square, down Sudbury Street, turned into Portland Street, and dashed to the North Station, arriving just in time to catch my train to Malden.

When I had settled into my seat I decided to feast my own eyes on my new riches—the most money I had ever earned in one week, or had at one time. I reached into my pocket, but there was nothing there—the money was gone! Somewhere in that mad dash to the station I had lost it. This was one of the minor tragedies of my life, and I needed all my mother's sympathy when I broke the news to her of what had happened.

I soon found that if there was to be any excitement about my job working for three solemn lawyers I would have to create it myself. I began to figure how I could have some fun with the speaking tube that ran from the main entrance lobby of the office building up to all the various offices. A caller would blow on this tube, making a whistling noise at our end. We would answer through the tube, get his name and find out whom he wanted to see. If he was welcome, we would call back and tell him to come up.

One day I put red pepper in the main entrance end of the tube and when a would-be client blew in it, instead of answering, I blew back. The caller came up in a towering rage, wiping his eyes and cursing the contraption as an invention of the devil.

Another pastime of mine was to take the little lead shot from the containers that held the pens on the lawyers' desks and throw it down on the cab horses along the curb of Pemberton Square just below our windows; then watch them jump and wake their dozing drivers.

For some reason Arthur J. Selfridge had taken quite a fancy to me—so much so that he even wanted to adopt me. He was a wealthy and successful lawyer, and the proposition had its tempting aspects—but of course my father and mother wouldn't hear of it.

As an alternative Mr. Selfridge proposed that I should work for him exclusively. My parents urged me to return to school and I did so, but midway of my last school year, my second in high school, I quit and announced that I was going to take the position. It was the only rosy, easy job I ever had. Through the months until spring came I loafed in the shadow of the great lawyer, doing his errands and enjoying his friendly kindness in a thousand ways.

Mr. Selfridge owned a fine large yacht and was a member of the Hull Yacht Club near Nantasket Beach. Often he would take me with him to the Yacht Club, take me out sailing on his yacht, let me order anything I wanted.

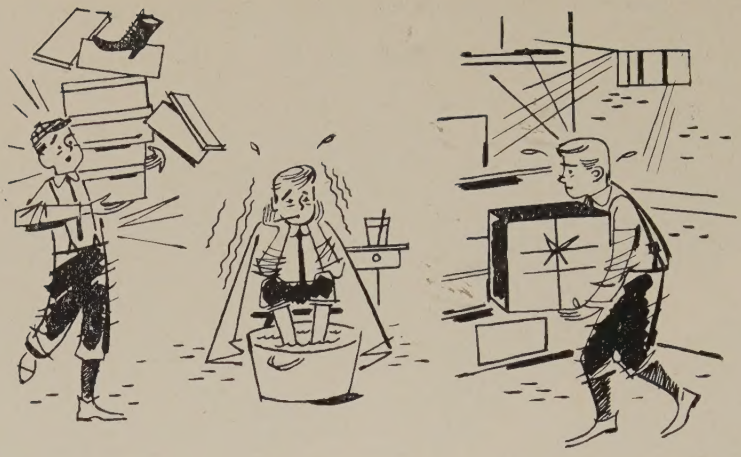
You would think I had just graduated Summa Cum Laude, the way I'm strutting along after receiving an honorary degree from Bates College. I well knew where the credit for my success belonged but, between you and me, I got a bang out of finally wearing a cap and gown!

I recall that on one of those trips the news came that Jim Corbett had knocked out John L. Sullivan. This was an event of shocking importance to us, for John L., the Boston heavyweight champion, was the pride of the community and it was unthinkable that anyone could have taken his title.

Those week ends at the Yacht Club and on yachting trips very nearly spoiled me. They were wonderful fun but not too good an influence for a boy of 15, and one day I realized it. I must have done some heavy thinking, saying to myself, "This is all very lovely but you are never going to amount to anything in an easy life like this. You have got to get into some kind of business.

Sometimes I wonder how I had sense enough at 15 to leave a soft job to look for a hard one. But I guess that dream of wanting a store was leading me on. Anyway, I decided to look for a position in some mercantile business where I would eventually have a chance to sell.

So, difficult as it was to say goodbye to my benefactor, I gave up my job with Mr. Selfridge and started searching for a place where hard work might reap its rewards. I found what I thought I was looking for. It took me into the wholesale shoe busines—and there was no doubt about the hard work. But I was to get my chance to sell—I hoped!



CHAPTER 3

"I Get Off To A Bad Start"

Some years ago a magazine writer asked me that old bromide of a question: "To what do you attribute the success of your company?" He looked let down and bewildered when I answered: "The mistakes I made and the mistakes of my employers —particularly those that were unfair."

The fact is that mistakes can be a powerful lesson, if one recognizes them for what they are and draws the right conclusions—particularly so if this is done while working for someone else. All my life I have been making mistakes—and profiting by them. I have watched other people make mistakes—and I have profited by those too.

In a business as intensely competitive as retailing, we can be sure that chains and individual stores are experimenting all the time. We can learn a lot by watching what goes on. We can save money by *not* using methods that others have found not successful, just as we can make money by adopting those that are.

Of course the mistakes made by a boy of 15 can hardly be as serious as those a man can make in a large business, but I made two mistakes in that first year after I left Mr. Selfridge, and they certainly were good lessons for me. One was when I tried to be a show-off on a Boston street, and the other when I put my arm around a girl at the wrong time.

The job I got after leaving Mr. Selfridge, the Boston lawyer, was running errands for Parker, Holmes & Company, a wholesale shoe house on Federal Street in Boston. Our salesmen would go out calling on retail shoe stores during the day and would come in the next morning with their orders. The order clerks would check our stock and if there were certain sizes we could not fill, it was my job to go out to other shoe jobbing houses in the district and get the items missing from our stock.

I soon found that in order to gather up 15 or 20 boxes of shoes from neighboring warehouses and bring them back, I had to do something of a balancing act, for I would often go along the street carrying boxes piled much higher than my head. I got so expert at it that I was inclined to show off a bit, thus attracting the attention of people along the sidewalks.

One day I had piled the boxes higher than ever before and was demonstrating my skill at crossing the street with them when suddenly a trolley car bore down on me with such speed that I gave a quick jump to get out of its way, and my boxes went flying in all directions. The street was covered with boxes and shoes. I had to gather them up, and get the shoes back into boxes—thus entertaining the laughing sidewalk crowds with a far different spectacle than I had originally planned!

I was overwhelmed with the shame of my predicament and thereafter conducted a more orderly messenger service.

Parker, Holmes & Company may have considered it a promotion, but anyway that winter they transferred me from running errands to a position in their rubber cellar. This was a large, damp, unheated basement in which they stored their stocks of rubber footwear. In fact, the room was more like a dungeon than a stockroom. The only window was high up near the ceiling by the sidewalk at one end. There was no sunlight, little ventilation—only dampness and chill.

Lifting and tugging at heavy cases until I was wet with perspiration, then cooling off in that near-to-freezing temperature, the result was inevitable. I fell seriously ill with pneumonia and pleurisy. The doctor found that I had water on my lungs and in order to save my life had to tap them, and that without the use of any anesthetic.

It took me a long time to recover from this illness. I was left with adhesions and in danger of developing tuberculosis. Our doctor said that what I needed most was to live for a while in some higher altitude where the air was drier than it was on the seacoast.

What appeared to be a solution came in the offer of a job with the Pike Manufacturing Company, makers of whetstones, at Pike's Station, a small village in New Hampshire. I was to be an entry clerk, but when I arrived at the factory I found that the one who had held this position was still on the job, and for some reason Mr. Pike could not replace him immediately. He therefore put me on what was presumed to be temporary work.

One of the company's products was a paperweight consisting of transparent glass on top and sandstone on the bottom with an advertisement in between. In order to make the sandstone section fit the glass, it was necessary to rub it down by putting water on the sandstone, then rubbing and polishing it down to the proper size. This was the job I was given to do. I worked by myself out in a far corner of a warehouse. I was utterly lonely, and my only prospective reward was a wage of $5 per week. It was my first experience in being away from home, and I was so homesick that I literally watered the sandstone with my tears!

At the end of a long day I went to my room in the attic of Mr. Pike's house; but there in Mr. Pike's house I found that all was not dreariness and loneliness at Pike's Station, New Hampshire. The Pikes had a baby and employed a girl named Mary Smith to take care of it. Mary was just my age, and we immediately struck up a companionship in which I saw glamorous prospects.

One Sunday Mr. and Mrs. Pike were going out for a ride in their "buggy with the fringe on top" and they invited me to go with them. They sat in the front seat and Mary and I sat in the back seat, Mary holding the baby.

It was a beautiful day in summer. The sun was shining. The country all around was beautiful.

When our young Assistant Managers have their meetings in New York, they always seem to enjoy hearing about the early days of our Company. I must admit I'm only too willing to oblige. I wonder though, if any of these fellows ever realize how I envy them? What an exciting future is still ahead for them. . . . What wonderful stories they'll have to tell at my age!

The kindness shown me by Mr. Pike in taking me along and the privilege of being with Mary made me utterly happy. I began to sing "Molly and I and the Baby." That was my first mistake. Mr. Pike, a huge man with an enormous beard, a veritable patriarch of a figure, turned and scowled at me. I realized that he wanted no singing from the back seat.

After a while we stopped to pick berries. When I brought some of the berries back to the buggy, I made my second mistake. I gave them to Mary instead of to Mrs. Pike. Mr. Pike glared at me and I knew I was in wrong again.

But the worst was yet to come. As we drove on, I still felt so happy, and so fortunate after my lonely hours in the warehouse, that I moved up closer to Mary and put my arm around her. That was my third mistake, for just at that moment Mr. Pike turned around and saw us. He pulled the horses to a sharp stop.

"You little reprobate!" he bellowed. "Get out of this buggy, get back to the house, pack your things, and get out of town as fast as you can!"

So I scrambled out of the buggy, hoofed it back to town, packed up my few belongings, and began figuring how I was going to get back to Boston, for I didn't have enough money for railroad fare all the way. When Mary returned from the ride, I told her my troubles and she said that if I could get as far as Plymouth, New Hampshire, there was someone in the drugstore there who would lend me the money for the rest of the trip. Her friend made good on this promise and with his help I got back home.

Once more I set out to look for a job. On the basis of my experience in the wholesale shoe house, I got a job in a retail shoe store on Cambridge Street in Boston, at $6 a week. I soon found that this was not going to be a permanent connection. There were two clerks in the store who took every possible opportunity to make life miserable for me as a newcomer. One of them, a lad about my own age, seemed to take delight in playing every dirty trick on me that he could think of.

The only thing I learned in this store was how *not* to treat the people who work for you—and that, too, proved to be an important lesson.

As soon as I could, I changed and went to work for the Massachusetts Boot and Shoe Company which had several retail stores in Boston. My first job was working in their rubber warehouse on Friend Street, near the North Station, from which their stores were supplied with rubbers. After serving an apprenticeship there, I was given an opportunity to sell in their store on Tremont Row. There I worked from 8 in the morning until 8 or 9 in the evening every day, and on Saturday night until 11 o'clock.

The manager told me that in selling I would also have an opportunity to earn a bonus in addition to my weekly wage. I soon found out how the bonus had to be earned: like all the other sales people, I would be paid 5 cents for every 50 cents I got out of a customer—over and above the regular retail price!

The management had discovered that sailors landing in Boston after long voyages would come up Hanover Street from the docks and stop at our store to buy shoes. They had little idea of what the prices should be and often they were drunk. We were told that if a sailor wanted a pair of shoes on which the regular retail price, for example, was $1.50, it was often possible to charge him as much as $3.50. In this way the store would get $2 more than its legitimate profit, out of which we clerks would get 20 cents!

This was my first experience—and my last—with a firm so completely unscrupulous in its treatment of its customers.

Needless to say, the Massachusetts Boot and Shoe Company has long since been out of business. But during my own brief period of employment there I could not help thinking what an opportunity that store had to build a sound business, one in which everybody would be given the best values and the best service to be found in all of Boston.

Such a policy could be the means of attracting customers in ever-increasing numbers, and prompt them to come back again and again. That, I said to myself, was what I would do—if ever I had a store.

CHAPTER 4

"The Power Of A Few Kind Words"

I suppose it is only natural that the people we remember best and longest are those who give us help and encouragement when we need it most.

First on that honor roll for me was of course my mother. Every boyhood endeavor of mine was spurred by the certain promise of her approval and her praise. No matter how dark the circumstances might be at home, she would say, "Wait, son! Just you wait!"

No wonder I grew up in an inspired expectancy of better times to come, and no wonder I was willing to work endless hours when good words were always waiting for me at home.

But not until I was 18 or 19 did I realize the power of commendation from an employer for work well done. That is why, next to my mother's on my personal honor roll, is the name of Ed Dutton of the department store Houghton & Dutton.

At last I had obtained a position in one of Boston's big, substantial department stores. The size and reputation of the store and the fact that I was to receive $8 a week made me feel that now I was really on my way.

This time I really had a chance to sell, in the shoe department of the bargain basement. I had more good luck—I made the acquaintance of Ed Dutton, nephew of B. F. Dutton, head of the firm. He was the shoe buyer, and in charge of the store's shoe departments.

Only a few weeks after I went to work, the head of the basement shoe department was dismissed. As soon as I heard about it I ran upstairs, found Ed Dutton, and asked him for the job.

I do not know who else he may have been considering, but I have found that if two people are being considered for a job and one has the initiative to ask for it and the other doesn't, the chances are that the one who asks for it will get it. Anyway I got this one.

For the first time I had, with certain limitations, the responsibility for a department in a store. Though "Bargain Basement — Shoes" may have been a lowly division of the firm's operations, I was happy because it was all mine. I thought of it, not as a department, but as a store—my store—and immediately began to figure ways how to increase its sales.

Directly in front of the door at the main-floor entrance to the store was a bargain counter, available periodically to any department that could demonstrate that it had merchandise of unusual attraction value. I had seen it on various days piled

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But not until I was 18 or 19 did I realize the power of commendation from an employer for work well done. That is why, next to my mother's on my personal honor roll, is the name of Ed Dutton of the department store Houghton & Dutton.

At last I had obtained a position in one of Boston's big, substantial department stores. The size and reputation of the store and the fact that I was to receive $8 a week made me feel that now I was really on my way.

This time I really had a chance to sell, in the shoe department of the bargain basement. I had more good luck—I made the acquaintance of Ed Dutton, nephew of B. F. Dutton, head of the firm. He was the shoe buyer, and in charge of the store's shoe departments.

Only a few weeks after I went to work, the head of the basement shoe department was dismissed. As soon as I heard about it I ran upstairs, found Ed Dutton, and asked him for the job.

I do not know who else he may have been considering, but I have found that if two people are being considered for a job and one has the initiative to ask for it and the other doesn't, the chances are that the one who asks for it will get it. Anyway I got this one.

For the first time I had, with certain limitations, the responsibility for a department in a store. Though "Bargain Basement — Shoes" may have been a lowly division of the firm's operations, I was happy because it was all mine. I thought of it, not as a department, but as a store—my store—and immediately began to figure ways how to increase its sales.

Directly in front of the door at the main-floor entrance to the store was a bargain counter, available periodically to any department that could demonstrate that it had merchandise of unusual attraction value. I had seen it on various days piled

with bargains in women's handbags, hosiery, men's shirts, and neckties, but to my knowledge shoes had never had a chance.

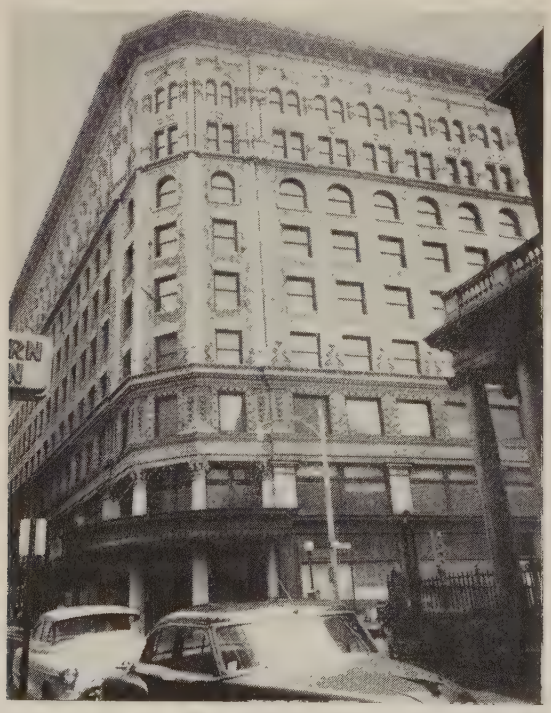
I looked over our stock and found that we had two fast sellers—women's house slippers and men's imitation alligator slippers — both at 49 cents a pair. So I asked the man who assigned the bargain table if I could have it one day. When he said yes, I piled it high with the 49-cent slippers. Immediately they began to sell!

As soon as the stock on the table would go down, I would hurry back to our basement department, get another bushel basket full of slippers, and pushing my way through the crowd of customers, would empty the basket out on the counter. Immediately buying would start up again. The very act of handling and displaying the slippers in this dramatic way attracted the customers. Actually, we sold as many slippers in one day from that counter as we had sold in a week in the basement.

I am still a stickler for bargain tables at the front of the store!

Shortly after this a wonderful thing happened to me. Ed Dutton saw what was going on at this bargain counter. He came up to me, put his hand on my shoulder, and said, "Good boy!"

I cannot possibly explain what those two words did for me. They were the first words of approval that I had ever had from an employer since I had run errands for Mr. Selfridge.



Here's a recent photo of the building that housed Houghton and Dutton's. Except for parked cars, it doesn't look too different from when I first proudly entered its portals.

Through all the years of my boyhood in which I had worked at dozens of different jobs, I had always been bullied, until it seemed impossible that I would ever do anything that could win recognition for work well done. In fact, it seemed to be the custom of the time for employers to drive and criticize and browbeat their employees with the deliberate purpose of striking fear into their hearts. I guess they did this to discourage anyone from asking for a raise. Yet here was Ed Dutton actually giving me encouragement!

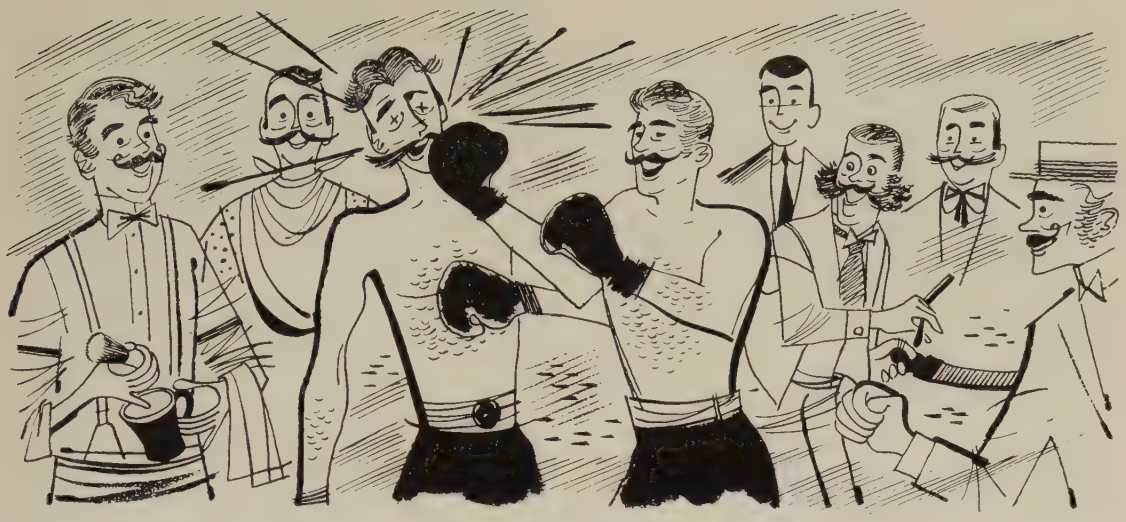
Suddenly I said to myself, "Maybe I can amount to something after all."

We hear a lot these days about the importance of human relationships, and we try to establish good will and good feeling between employer and employee, between salesman and customer. This was one of my first experiences with the importance of good human relationships in business.

Those two words—"Good boy!"—spoken by Ed Dutton, gave me a new confidence in myself, a new incentive to do my best. And they did something more. Right then and there I resolved that no hours could be too long, no work too hard, no sacrifice too great on my part to help Ed Dutton make a success of that basement shoe department.

After that I was constantly on the lookout for more chances to win approval. I studied our customers to see what merchandise they wanted, and studied our stocks to see what merchandise represented the greatest values. Whenever I found something exceptional, I would ask for the bargain counter and get it. Ed Dutton continued to observe my enterprise and to give his approval.

Up to this time I had been learning largely from mistakes. Here was a lesson in the importance of recognition for work well done, which was to be valuable to me when I got my first store. But I was to make a wide detour on a strange road before that day arrived.



CHAPTER 5

"I Detour On A Strange Road"

During the period when I was working for Houghton & Dutton, I participated in an adventure that might have had more serious consequences but for the restraining counsel of my mother, who cautioned me that I was bringing embarrassment to the family and also endangering my advancement in business. But it also taught me some important lessons that would one day serve me well when I got my first store.

Two of my closest friends were the Brownell boys, who worked at Lubin's Drug Store a few doors down the street from Houghton & Dutton's. Through them I met Timmy Kearns, an Irish elevator boy at the Boston Athletic Club, who had ambitions to become a professional boxer. Timmy was such a personable, intelligent boy that I took to him at once.

Shortly after this meeting, one of the Brownell boys met a tragic death and, as a result his brother invited me to come and live at the Brownell home so that I would not have to make the trip each night to Malden.

One day during the lunch hour I ran into Timmy Kearns on the street. He had lost his job as elevator operator, had been ordered out of his room because he could not pay his rent, and had had nothing to eat for two days. I asked him to come home that night with me and he stayed on at the Brownell's for several days.

During the evenings in my room an exciting idea was born. I had taken such a fancy to Timmy that I wanted to help him, and he had just one ambition—to be a boxer. He was a lightweight, 5 feet 7 inches tall, had a good solid build, and in a few amateur bouts had made a good showing.

Why not help Timmy by arranging some matches for him? Just possibly both of us could make a little extra money. Anyway, it would be an exciting new adventure for me. Timmy agreed and we shook hands on the deal.

Our first problem was that professional boxing was illegal in Massachusetts at the time. Still we knew that plenty of matches were put on secretly, and there were always plenty of fans ready to pay a small fee if they knew where a bout could be seen.

The first place we found was a barber shop on Portland Street, run by a man by the name of Crawford. Here, when a bout was to be staged, Crawford would pull the barber chairs out into the hallways, and the spectators would stand around against the walls.

The room was about the size of a small ring. There was no canvas on the floor, no posts, no ropes. It was about as primitive an arena as one could imagine—but here in this barber shop we staged our first bout between Timmy Kearns and a skinny six-footer named Joe Robinson. Timmy was badly outmatched in size, but won decisively.

When the bout was over and Crawford had taken out his share for expenses, there was just $7 left. To our astonishment, Robinson, the loser, suddenly grabbed this money and ran out into the street. But Timmy Kearns was after him, caught him in an alley, and took the money away from him. So he had to fight twice that night to get his $7.

Even the $7, however, was an incentive to Timmy and me. We began looking for a larger place where we could accommodate more people,

and finally we found a loft on Beach Street in Boston that we could rent for very little money. This loft had been used as a candy factory. We had to use acid on the floor to clean it. Chinese occupied the floor below. We did not want them to know what we were doing.

In this building there were four flights of stairs that ran straight up from just inside the street level doorway to the entrance to our floor. When we were staging a bout we would put a mat on the floor for a ring. Then we would station one man at the top of the stairway and another at the bottom. If the man at the bottom suddenly disappeared (a sign the police were around), then the man at the top would immediately give us the signal. The event would promptly change from a boxing to a wrestling match, which was not illegal.

We secretly staged bouts in this loft once a week for several weeks, making from $15 to $25 profit for Timmy and myself each time. Then we were caught at it by the police and warned that no more boxing would be allowed. After that we moved our matches out of town to Lynn, Lowell, Lawrence, and to Manchester, New Hampshire. Sometimes we made as much as $50 or $100 on a match.

Timmy was getting better all the time and was defeating all opponents. We became such close friends, and I so interested in his progress, that we were inseparable outside of my hours in the store. We would meet very early in the morning and do mile after mile on the road before breakfast. We would spar together.

This almost-stolen recreation did me an immense amount of good physically. My muscles hardened and I really learned how to take care of myself—something that has stayed with me all my life.

Of course word got around of Timmy's success in these undercover bouts, and George Toohey, Sporting Editor of the *Boston Post*, began to take an interest in him. He saw in Timmy, as I did, a possible future champion, and through his influence we got Timmy matched to fight Eddie Connelly, then lightweight champion of England, in Cleveland on February 15, 1898. I remember this date well because that was the day the battleship *Maine* was blown up in Havana Harbor, the spark that started the Spanish-American War.

This match, however, presented a problem. We had to go to Cleveland and train there. It was the first venture into the Big Time for me and I just had to be with Timmy. Fortunately Ed Dutton was sympathetic. He, too, had become interested in Timmy Kearns. He knew how much this fight would mean to us, and he got me permission to take two weeks off from the store for the trip to Cleveland.

The money that Timmy and I had been saving together lasted right up to the day before the fight. Then we had to go on mighty slim rations. The fight was to be held in the Cleveland Armory and it was to be a 20-round bout—believe it or not—for those were the days when bouts went 20 rounds and often much longer if they went to a finish.

The night of the fight there was a terrific snowstorm on Lake Erie and Cleveland was caught in a blizzard, but we had a pretty good crowd just the same.

I was helping in the box office. After most of the spectators were inside the cashier gave me the proceeds of the ticket sales in a bag. He said, "Take this money and get it out of here fast and hide it until the fight is over."

I don't know what it was all about, but I suspect he was afraid an attachment would be made on the money. In any event, I took the money, ran with it to our room in the Hollenden Hotel, and hid it behind the bathtub. Then I raced back to the Armory and got into the ring in time to be a second for Timmy.

I had learned that if Timmy didn't get knocked out in the first five rounds, no one could beat him. He lasted the five rounds all right, and in the sixth landed a blow that made Connelly's eyes roll. After that round I said to Timmy, "Let's not take any chances. Let's just try to get a draw." And that is what he did. After 20 rounds, with both boxers still on their feet, the referee declared the bout a draw, and we got our share of the purse.

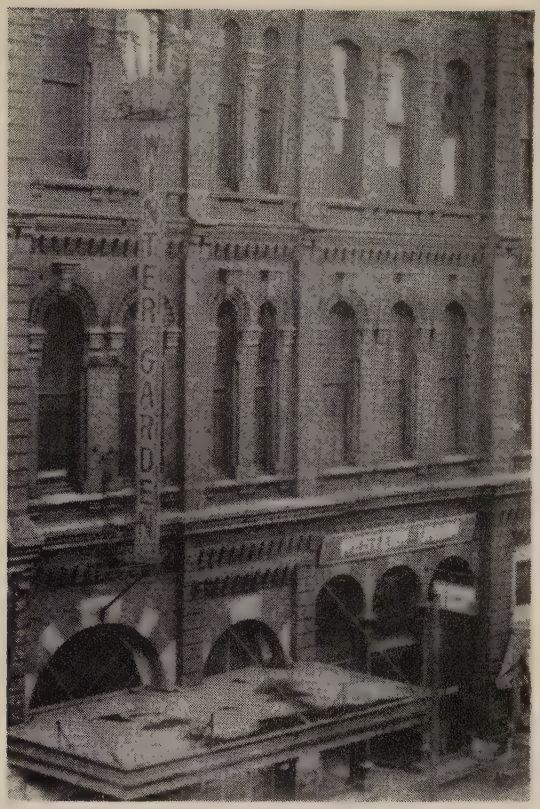
When Timmy and I got back to Boston and figured up our Cleveland venture, we found that after paying our expenses for railroad fare, training quarters and hotel, we had around $200 to divide.

Timmy's reputation as a boxer had been attracting increasing attention and his showing in Cleveland against the English lightweight champion placed him high among the contenders for the lightweight title. Timmy had come from Lawrence, Massachusetts, and I figured that in view of his local popularity it would be a good idea to put on an exhibition boxing match in his home town as a benefit for Timmy himself. I took the responsibility for management of this affair, engaged the Opera House, lined up several preliminary matches, handled the publicity, did everything.

When the night of the event came, I met with some sad surprises. The crowd was disappointing. The preliminary boxers demanded their money before going into the ring, so before each fight I would have to run down to the box office and get enough money for the small purse put up for each bout.

After I had made several trips to the box office for this purpose, the cashier said to me, "You had better cut this out or there won't be any money left for Timmy Kearns." That was not the worst of it—when Timmy himself turned up at the Opera House, it was apparent that he had been

This is the house I bought for my Mother and Father, using the "fight money" as down payment. It was still in good condition when sold at a substantial profit in 1945.



The sign says "Winter Garden" but it's the same Opera House in Lawrence where Timmy Kearns and I decided to end our careers in the "boxing world."

drinking. I had a tough time getting him in shape to make his appearance in the main event.

When it was all over, we had just $100 left. Knowing how hard I had worked to make the affair a success for him, and also that I had spent all my small savings in his behalf, Timmy insisted that I take $75 for my share.

That $75 turned out to be an important piece of money for me. My father and mother had moved repeatedly during the past few years from one rented house to another. Now it appeared that they were going to have to move again. So I arranged to purchase a house for them, using that $75 as a down payment and agreeing to make a small additional payment out of my salary each month.

My father and mother lived in that house for more than 25 years. So the Timmy Kearns benefit in the Lawrence Opera House did some good after all.

Not long ago I went with some of the executives of the Grant Company to visit several stores in New England. In the course of this trip we visited a beautiful new Grant store in Lawrence, Massachusetts. While there, I said to the manager, "I have vivid recollections of a certain event in the old Opera House here in Lawrence fifty or more years ago. Just where is it? I would like to take a look at it."

He said, "You are standing on the site right now, Mr. Grant. It was torn down to build this store."

The Lawrence benefit marked the end of my venture into professional boxing. My older brother, Elihu, had entered the ministry, my mother was a religious person, and my activities were becoming embarrassing to both of them. They told me that I had better devote all my time to business, and by this time I was ready to agree.

But I had learned a lot about promoting which was to be useful to me all the rest of my life. I had discovered that to be successful in dealing with the public you had to manage to get people really *excited* about what you are offering them, whether it be entertainment or merchandise.

This photo was taken about the same time that I was working for Mr. Bailey. Will you look at all that hair! Now, why didn't I take care of it?

CHAPTER 6

"I Try To Advance Too Fast"

My first assignment to run a shoe department for J. S. Bailey in Amesbury, Mass., was in this store.

After four years at Houghton & Dutton, I was getting restless for advancement. I had started in the store at $8 a week and by asking from time to time for a 50-cent raise—and getting it only with Ed Dutton's help—I had edged my way up to $11. I had learned a great deal in this store and felt that I was ready for something more important that would pay more money.

Like every young fellow in that state of mind, I spent a good deal of time each Sunday poring over the help-wanted advertisements in the Boston newspapers. Time after time I would apply for a position only to find that there was some catch in the offer. An advertisement headed "Salesman Wanted—$50 a week" would stir my imagination and off would go a letter of application. Invited to call, and enjoying a few hours of elated anticipation, I would find it was the kind of job where I would have to pay $25 for some worthless samples and then have to trust to making my money entirely on commissions selling from house to house.

Anyway, I felt that my future lay in the retail store field—I still wanted a store—and every time I would spot an advertisement for retail people, off would go a letter of application.

Finally one day in reply to such an inquiry I received a letter from Jason S. Bailey, 53 State Street, Boston, asking me to come and see him. I did not recognize the name, but when I called he told me that he operated several retail stores. He sized me up, asked me many questions and then said, "All right, I'll give you $20 a week to buy shoes for me."

This was such a tremendous advance over what I was getting that I could hardly believe my ears. After some of my disappointing experiences, I thought there must be some catch to such a liberal offer, and told him I would like to have a day to think it over. Back at Houghton & Dutton, I asked the millinery buyer if he had ever heard of Jason S. Bailey.

You can imagine my relief and joy when he said, "Oh, yes, he is a rich man and a very successful merchant. He owns the Pitts-Kimball Building and a lot of other property in Scollay Square here in Boston, and has stores in several other cities. But he's a very hard man to work for."

With the prospect of making $20 a week the corresponding prospect of his being a hard man to work for did not bother me if only my employer was honest. I told Ed Dutton about the offer and he agreed that it was a good opportunity. So next day I went back to Mr. Bailey and told him I would be ready to start the following Monday.

He owned two stores in Scollay Square, a small department store and a store that he had recently purchased, and he wanted to open a shoe store. He agreed to give me a year's contract as manager and buyer for the latter store. Here, too, I was to learn an important lesson—the lesson of trying to advance too fast.

Many a time in after years, as we developed a policy of training and gradual promotion for our store managers, I thought of the futility of my effort to make good in that job. True, I had had a good deal of experience in selling shoes, but I knew absolutely nothing about buying, about mark-up and turnover and stock control, or about the many other things a buyer and store manager must know.

It was inevitable that I should fail in this job, and I did in a big way. But Mr. Bailey evidently saw that I had a knack for selling, as well as unlimited energy, and he was generous enough to find a place for my talents, such as they were. He transferred me to a position as shoe salesman in his department store.

Back on familiar ground, I made a sufficiently good showing so that Mr. Bailey picked me for another job which was to be a challenge to my resourcefulness and ingenuity without exposing me to responsibilities for which I was not yet prepared. I was sent to a store in which he had an interest at Amesbury, Massachusetts.

The shoe department in this store had not been doing well and I was sent to close out the department and dispose of the stock. There were a good many French-Canadians in Amesbury, most of whom could read French but not English. So I went through the stock, grouped it into lots and marked it at tempting prices. Then I went to a local job-printer familiar with both languages, wrote copy for bargain circulars, and had the circulars printed in English on one side and French on the other.

Often I had peddled bills as a boy in Malden and I knew what sometimes happened to circulars, so I hired several boys and went out with them to make sure that they really delivered my handbills, putting them into mail boxes, under doors, and into wagons and buggies along the street.

In the store I used the methods I had found successful at Houghton & Dutton, piling the shoes on bargain tables marked with big signs in both English and French.

This method was so successful in getting rid of the obsolete stock that as a reward my employers found a little store for me in Biddeford, Maine. This was what we termed an "outlet store" for selling odd lots of shoes which we bought from factories closing out discontinued numbers. Everything we could get was offered at a bargain price —everything from rubbers at 29 cents a pair to women's sheepskin high-button boots at 99 cents a pair. They were the cheapest kind of shoes imaginable.

Here in Biddeford I found that practically all the customers were French-Canadians, and knowing no French at all I was really up against it to talk to them. There is nothing so helpless as a tongue-tied salesman and I decided that I had better do something about my case.

In the Western Union office next door I found a French messenger boy. In exchange for a pair of shoes he agreed to teach me enough French words so that I could at least answer customers' questions and make a few observations to help close a sale. Here, as I recall it, was the substance of my specialized knowledge of French:

le soulier	shoe
les caoutchoucs	rubbers
la pantoufle	slipper
la bottine	boot
quelle pointure?	what size?
bottine a lacets	lace shoe
bottine a boutons	button shoe
trop grand	too big
trop petit	too small
al, il vous chausse parfaitement	ah, a perfect fit!

Then there were the all-important words for the prices most commonly marked on our bargains:

vingt-neuf	29 (cents)
quarante-neuf	49 (cents)
soixante-dix-neuf	79 (cents)
quatre-vingt-dix-neuf	99 (cents)

Years later, they were still about the only words I knew when I made my first trip to France!

Mr. Bailey, watching only his sales reports, evidently decided that I was making good, for I was sent on once more to open a shoe store in Lewiston, Maine. Here again I found that most of the customers spoke only French. This was a somewhat larger operation, so I hired a French boy to work regularly in the store and had two more French boys come in Saturday nights, when we had our heaviest trade.

With the responsibility of keeping up our stock as well as selling it, I found that Sunday was only a day to work harder than I did during the other six. We would keep the Lewiston store open until 11 o'clock Saturday night, then I would take a train to Biddeford, spend Sunday making up my orders for the shoes needed, and catch a train at 11 o'clock Sunday night to get back to Lewiston at 2 o'clock Monday morning. Both going and coming I had to change trains at Brunswick, Maine, and many a winter night found me waiting for my connecting train with the temperature sometimes as low as 30 degrees below zero.

Always the absorbing thought in my mind was that finally I was getting ahead in business. Three times now Mr. Bailey had given me the responsibility for handling the sales in a store, and by the time I had been placed in charge of the Lewiston store, I was also a better judge of what to order.

Jason S. Bailey may have been a hard task master, but he knew how to get the best out of me. He gave me a chance where enterprise and industry could show results, and each time I succeeded I was rewarded with a greater opportunity. Every new job brought me face to face with some new problem that called for new and greater resourcefulness.

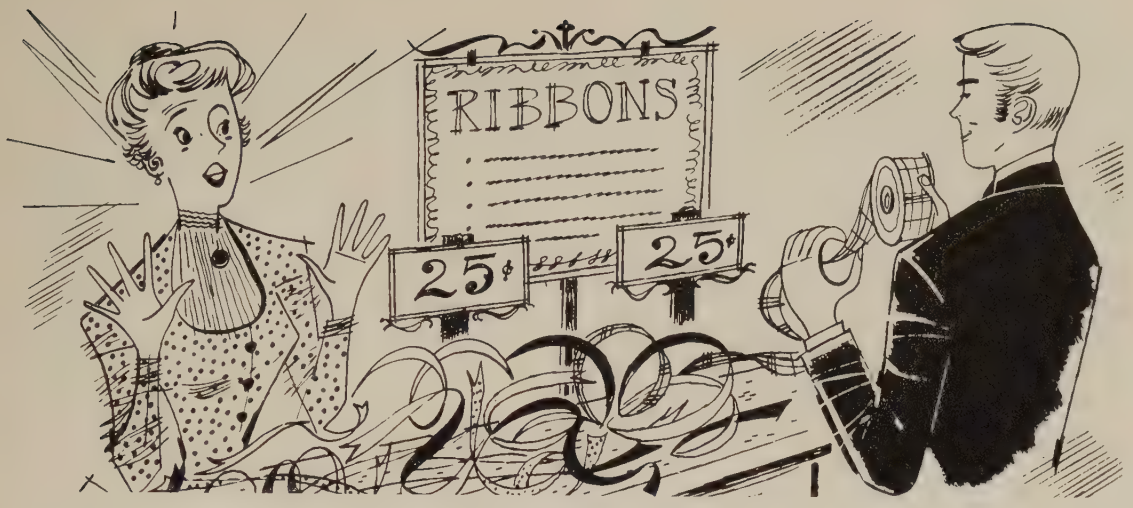
Much as I respected him, I was afraid of him. I used to dream of him with horns. I made up my mind then that if ever I got to be an employer I would use very different methods than his.

I was beginning to feel that so far as Mr. Bailey's operations were concerned, in Lewiston I had reached my "farthest north." But I had no idea that from a totally unexpected source I was soon to have the opportunity to work in one of the best medium-sized department stores in all New England.

Looking back now on my experience in working for Jason S. Bailey, I can understand both why I failed in the first job he gave me, and why the success I eventually achieved was won at such cost in trial and error. No one ever attempted to teach me even the simplest rudiments of successful store management. I was sent out absolutely on my own to sink or swim.

Years later when I opened my first store I decided that I would profit by this lesson. I tried my best to give each sales-person the benefit of what I knew of display, of keeping stock, of handling merchandise and serving customers. And then I tried to create a spirit of teamwork.

I was to learn something of the value of teamwork in my new association after leaving Jason S. Bailey, for good fortune was taking me to the fine, well-managed department store of Almy, Bigelow & Washburn at Salem, Massachusetts.



CHAPTER 7

"I Get An Idea For A New Kind Of Store"

My life has been scattered with "ifs"—every one an opportunity. What I did about them was up to me.

If I hadn't met up with Timmy Kearns, I might not have built up the rugged good health that I have enjoyed all these years.

If I hadn't seen shoppers fighting for slippers at my bargain counter at Houghton & Dutton's, I might not have caught fire with the idea that excitement makes merchandise move fast.

If my brother Elihu hadn't married a niece of James F. Almy, I might not have gotten my idea for a new kind of store.

Certainly, I had never dreamed that my brother's marriage might have any bearing on my future. But it just goes to show how the long arm of coincidence can reach out and tap you on the shoulder.

Mr. Almy was the founder and principal owner of Almy, Bigelow & Washburn, a successful department store in Salem, Massachusetts. Hearing that this store was looking for a shoe buyer, Elihu told Mr. Almy that he knew just the man for the job. The first I knew about it was when Mr. Washburn, at Mr. Almy's suggestion, came up to Lewiston, Maine, to see me.

Mr. Washburn must have been a bit shocked when he saw the kind of merchandise I was selling, and the bargain-basement atmosphere of the store. But after sizing me up and asking a good many questions, he offered me $15 a week to take over the job of shoe buyer at Salem. Although this was $5 a week less than I had been making for some time, I decided that offsetting advantages would justify the change. The new position would take me out of what was virtually a one-man store and back into a well-known retail establishment, one where there should be an opportunity to get ahead.

So I took the job and for the next three years managed the shoe department of Almy, Bigelow & Washburn, advancing during that period to a salary of $35 a week. In this department I had the full responsibility for buying, and a man and a woman to help me sell.

My first discovery was that I had a better quality of merchandise and a better class of customers than at any time in my previous experience. I was surprised to find that it was just as easy to sell shoes at $3.50 a pair as it had been at 99 cents. That was another important lesson learned: that all people do not want the cheapest thing to be had. And as the store itself had an air of dignity, I had to tone down my tendency for sensational promotions.

In this I was under the watchful eye of Walter F. Bigelow, president of the store. Tall and slim, with white hair and mustache, distinguished in appearance, completely charming and gracious, he was the perfect symbol of the store's own dignity. I had tremendous admiration for him and I think he had a rather amused liking for the young hustler who was creating such a stir of activity in the shoe department with his unorthodox methods. But he was prompt in cautioning me whenever I did do things not quite becoming to a long-established, conservative retail institution.

For example, if I woke up at six in the morning in my room at the Y.M.C.A. and saw that it was snowing outside, I would hurry down to the store, paint my own signs featuring specials in overshoes, rubbers and rubber boots and paste these signs on the windows so that the first people on the streets would see them. Of course by so doing I was going over the head of the window-dresser, who would promptly complain to the store president.

This was taken when my brother, Elihu, and his wife sailed to Palestine. It was their wedding, years before that led to my association with Almy, Bigelow and Washburn.

Mr. Bigelow would come to me and say, "Now, now, Billie, you know you can't do that sort of thing." His reprimands on such occasions were given in such a manner that he never crushed my spirit. He knew and understood that my ambition and energy were important qualities in an employee. By helping me to keep myself under control he made them valuable assets to my department and to the store.

I had been managing the shoe department for about two years when Mr. Louis K. Roskoff was engaged as general manager of the store. He had been an executive of a small department store in New Bedford, Massachusetts, and recognized as a man of ability. Our store was larger than the one from which he came, and his advancement was prominently reported in the trade press.

Mr. Roskoff's coming held, of course, the prospect of radical changes and like other department managers, I was concerned as to how they might affect my position. The morning of his arrival I saw him enter the store with Mr. Bigelow and go up the stairs to the executive offices. Within a few minutes I followed and introduced myself.

"Mr. Roskoff," I said, "I just want you to know that if there is any way in which I can help you, I shall always be ready and anxious to do so."

To my surprise I found him to be a relatively young man—about 30 years of age, only a few years older than I. I liked him immediately and he thanked me cordially for my offer of cooperation and support.

One of Mr. Roskoff's first undertakings was division of the store into four sections, each in charge of a manager. One of these sections occupied the whole front of the main floor and included jewelry, leather goods, toiletries, notions, ribbons, neckwear and other accessories for women. To my delight, I was informed that I was to be manager of this section in addition to the shoe department.

Now I had the responsibility for buying and selling lines of merchandise with which I had had no previous experience. Knowing little or nothing about them, I had to learn, and the elderly ladies who had long supervised and bought for these departments showed no inclination to help me. It was plain that they resented having a youngster, only two years with the store, put over them.

The younger salesgirls, however, seemed glad to help me, and they became my tutors.

"What's this?" I would ask, picking up a roll of unfamiliar material at the lace counter.

"That's lace insertion, Mr. Grant."

"How can you insert a soft piece of lace into anything?"

"You don't insert it. You insert ribbon through the holes in the bend of lace, which is used on corset covers and other feminine underwear." And one of the girls would show me how it was done.

At the button counter I would pick up two cards of buttons. "Why do some buttons have two holes and some four?" I wanted to know.

"You use a four-hole button where you need greater strength in attaching it—with more threads to hold it."

At first the entire accessories section was an area of utter confusion to me. Exploring it for better acquaintance, I would get down on my hands and knees behind the counters to see what might be in all those stacks of boxes.

From under the button counter I brought out boxes yellow with age and opened them to find buttons in countless quantity and variety.

"What are these?" I asked.

"Those," said the salesgirl, "are the buttons that don't sell."

"How long have they been here?"

"Oh, five years, some of them ten years. The only time we get them out is when we take inventory."

I emptied a box out on the counter—big bone buttons, decorative buttons—a button collector's dream of antiques. To me the very idea of cluttering up a department with goods that didn't sell was stupid.

"Put them out with a special sign," I said, "at any price that will sell them. If they don't sell in a week, throw them away."

The department had been taking inventory of this stock for years at the full original price, with the result that they were carried at false value on the company's books.

"Tell me, what buttons sell faster?"

"Oh, these salt-water pearl buttons. We can't get enough of them. We are out of them nearly all the time."

"All right," I said, "let's see if we can't forecast our needs and order enough of all the best-sellers so we will never be out of stock. Let's make this the button counter in Salem where a customer can always get what she wants."

This suggestion brought an immediate response from the salesgirls. Soon they were all working with me to make sure we were seldom out of the most-wanted items, and of course that meant a big increase in sales.

This practice of clearing out the things that didn't sell, and of seeing that we kept complete stocks of what did sell, was repeated in every department with amazing sales increases.

How, I kept asking myself, could I get more excitement into these departments? How could I use some of my bargain-counter techniques without offending Mr. Bigelow?

I looked at the ribbon counter—all those rolls of ribbon in their orderly rows on the shelves. While the salesgirls looked on with horrified astonishment, I picked up a roll of a fast-selling ribbon, pulled off yard after yard, then put it back on the counter in a bin in loosely tumbling loops. I did this again and again until the whole counter was a riot of colorful display.

Customers stopped to look—and to buy! The ribbon counter became a new center of interest on that floor. People had never seen ribbons shown that way before.

Immediately in front of the store entrance we put a bargain counter, with an ever-fresh and changing display of special items. That bargain table frequently sold more units of a single item than were sold in a whole department in the regular way. Besides, Salem women found it hard to pass a store where they could see a crowd around a bargain counter. It drew customers in from the sidewalk.

I could not resist watching the speed with which merchandise moved off those counters, especially items selling at 25 cents. And increasingly I became aware of the contrast with what happened in the shoe department. There every customer came in with a problem, often complicated by indecision. To meet a woman's possible needs in footwear we had to have a wide assortment of sizes and widths —lace shoes and button shoes, calfskin shoes and kid shoes, high heels and low heels, broad toes and narrow toes. Then we had to fit the foot, often trying on pair after pair. And even at long last, when the customer took her purchase away, the sale might not have been finally made. A few days later she might be back complaining that the shoe hurt or was in some other way unsatisfactory.

One Saturday morning I had worked in the shoe department nearly an hour, trying to help a customer to come to a decision, finally making the sale after a dozen fittings. To cool my own exasperation after this chore, I took a turn through the accessories section of the store.

Around the jewelry counter, covered with 25-cent items, were five or six women. I saw each one pick up a hat pin, or a brooch or bracelet and put down her quarter. No problem. No sizes. No fitting. No selling effort. Every purchase was an impulse purchase. The salesgirl had only to answer questions and make change.

Suddenly I realized that this was the kind of selling I had been looking for! This was merchandise in motion! Yet because I had started in the shoe business as a boy and moved from one shoe store to another, I had been handicapped by a type of selling that required expert knowledge and special training to make a relatively small number of sales in a day. Another handicap of shoe selling was the large inventory that had to be carried, and the mark-downs on slow-selling numbers.

Now, seeing items move off a counter almost as fast as a girl could lay them out, gave me a sudden sense of release from bondage.

Here was a chance for resourcefulness in buying —finding items that would sell on sight. Here was a chance for dramatic display and promotion.

I ran upstairs to Mr. Roskoff's office.

"You have been telling me," I said, "about the importance of turnover in making profits for the store. I know that in the shoe department we turn our investment about two and a half times a year. What is our turnover on jewelry?"

"About ten times," he answered.

I did some quick thinking. That meant that we had to invest $100 in shoes to sell $250 worth in a year, but $100 invested in jewelry could produce $1,000 in sales in a year, with proportionately greater profit on the $100 investment.

Turnover was the magic that made more money, and turnover was made possible by featuring low-priced fast-selling items, well chosen, well displayed.

My mind was on fire with a new idea!

For days I watched the sales in other accessories departments. Twenty-five cent neckwear was a favorite—collars, jabots, fichus and berthas. At the hair goods counter, we had 25-cent switches, rolls and combs, not only regular combs but decorative back combs and side combs. All sold fast.

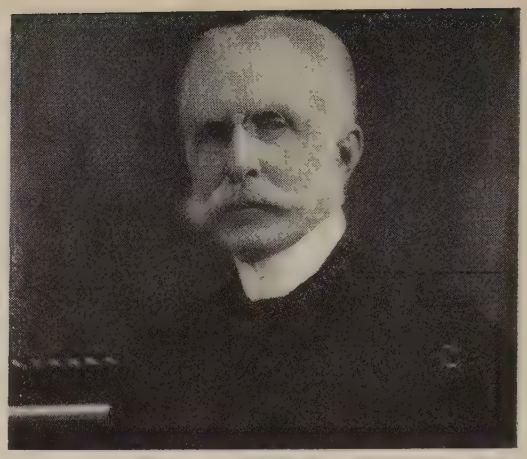
Gradually the idea dawned on me that twenty-five cents was a magic price!

One day I said to Mr. Roskoff: "What a business we could do if we could sell only twenty-five cent items and we kept a complete supply on hand all the time." As it was, we were out of twenty-five cent items more days than we had them in stock—because they sold so fast. Figuratively, we skimmed the cream off the fastest-selling merchandise.

"You know, that might be an idea for a new kind of store—a store where everything would sell for 25 cents or less," I said.

"That *is* an idea!" he exclaimed. "Let's talk about it tonight!"

I thank God for my good fortune in meeting this fellow, Louis Roskoff, who became my partner. In background is mansion of another partner, Mrs. Almy.



W. E. Bigelow, President of Almy, Bigelow & Washburn was just as kind and nice as he looks here. . . . 3rd partner in my new venture, and real friend.

CHAPTER 8

"I Plan My Dream Store"

After I suggested the idea of a 25¢ store to my boss, Mr. Louis K. Roskoff, who was general manager of the Almy, Bigelow & Washburn department store in Salem, I was fortunate in being able to see much of him outside of store hours.

We had become fast friends. On several occasions he took me to New York with him on buying trips and introduced me to the manufacturers and wholesalers from whom we bought merchandise for the accessory departments.

You can imagine what this close and constant association with an experienced merchandise man meant to me. I was gaining a knowledge of retailing which I might not otherwise have acquired—an understanding of stock control, turnover and the many details of store organization and management, of which I had had little previous knowledge.

Our association was to be even closer through the decision of Mrs. Sara Gardner to take a few roomers into her large house on Lafayette Street in Salem. Wanting to have some young people around her, she invited several of us, including Mr. Roskoff and me, to come to live as "paying guests" in her fine old mansion.

That is how it happened that the idea for a 25-cent store became one of the favorite subjects of conversation between Mr. Roskoff and me, not only the night after it had been first mentioned, but every night for weeks.

We explored the proposition from every angle. One thing concerned us. It was a novel idea. It would surely attract attention. But after the novelty had worn off, could such a store hold a permanent following of customers?

We agreed that the answer to that question would be the ability to find a large enough variety of attractive merchandise at the limited price of 25 cents. That would be a challenge to our resourcefulness in buying.

Piece by piece, we put our ideas together until we could visualize what such a store would be like.

It must be in no way a copy of the 5-and-10 cent stores which had been established some years before and were being conducted so successfully by Frank Woolworth and others. What then, would be the essential difference?

We thought we had the answer. As our own merchandising experience had been obtained in department stores, quite naturally we thought in terms of a store that was really departmentalized.

How many departments? We wrote them down, listing all the types of merchandise we could think of for which a 25-cent price would be possible. Here were some of the ones we chose to carry out our plan for a store with 21 departments, with no item in any department selling for more than 25 cents:

Notions
Ribbons
Handkerchiefs
Millinery
Jewelry
Women's Neckwear
Hosiery
Knit Underwear
Muslin Underwear
Corsets
Petticoats
Infants & Children's Wear
Slippers
Men's Neckties
Art Goods
Stationery
Sheet Music
Piece Goods
Kitchen Utensils
Framed Pictures
Toiletries, Etc.

By this time our idea had taken such definite form that we felt something should be done to make it a reality. Of course Mr. Roskoff, as general manager of a well-established department store, had too important a position to leave to go into a risky new venture. But my situation was different. I was satisfied that this was the chance I had been waiting for, and I was burning with the desire to put our plan into effect.

It was agreed that if we could raise the necessary capital I would resign my job, find a location, and set up and operate the store. It was also agreed that the most promising source of financial help probably would be the owners of Almy, Bigelow & Washburn, who knew us personally and had seen evidence of my aggressiveness and industry.

Mr. Almy had passed away, leaving his fortune and his interest in the business to his widow. I have a vivid mental picture of Mrs. Almy in those days when she was a familiar figure in Salem. A former school teacher, of medium height, round-shouldered, stern of countenance, she was always plainly and severely dressed. She lived in a mansion that Mr. Almy had built years before (she was his second wife) and although she could well have afforded the finest team and carriage in Salem, she rode a bicycle.

Like so many women thrown suddenly into a position of influence in a business, with no background or experience to guide her, Mrs. Almy, following the death of her husband, had a multitude of ideas for the operation of the store. We never knew what she was going to propose next, and I am sure that she must have tried the patience of the always calm and considerate Mr. Bigelow.

Laying our plan before Mrs. Almy and Mr. Bigelow and explaining it in detail, Mr. Roskoff invited them to join with us in making an investment in our venture.

The result was a four-way partnership. Each of the three others agreed to put up $2,000, and as I had only $1,000, they jointly lent me another thousand so that each of us had a one-fourth interest.

With the financing assured, the next step was the choice of a name. What should we call this new kind of store? Mr. Roskoff suggested, "The R. & G. Store," made up of his initial and mine. But that was discarded because, we agreed, it would not mean anything to the public. A store name should have a certain substance, if possible; it should imply that somebody is willing to place his reputation behind it. With that in mind, Mr. Roskoff discussed the subject with Mrs. Almy and Mr. Bigelow. I am not sure, but possibly out of that discussion came the thought that as this was a new and untried venture it might not be successful and therefore it might be unwise for any of their names —Almy, Bigelow or Roskoff—to be associated with it. Also I was the one who was to have the responsibility of management. On my ingenuity and industry its success or failure would depend. Also, I think they knew that if my own name was on that store I might work all the harder to make it succeed. Anyway, Mr. Roskoff came back from that meeting with the suggestion that the name be the W. T. Grant Company.

I welcomed the idea because to me it was a challenge. Not only would the opening of this new kind of store give me the opportunity I had long been waiting for: it would also give me the chance, if I succeeded, to make my name stand for something in the merchandising world.

With such an opportunity and such an incentive, no work could be too hard, no sacrifice on my part too great to make this exciting new venture the success that I firmly believed it could be.

With the name settled, we incorporated the W. T. Grant Company with an authorized capital stock of $16,000. One half of the stock was issued to us for our original investment, the other $8,000 was to be issued as additional capital was needed for the operation of the business.

Meanwhile, we were searching for a suitable location. Salem was out of the question because there we would be in competition with Almy, Bigelow & Washburn. An ideal location would be in some industrial city not too far from Salem, so that my three partners could keep in touch with what was happening. Mr. Bigelow came up with the best suggestion.

He reported that space for a store was available on the ground floor of the new Y.M.C.A. building on Market Street in Lynn, Massachusetts. I knew the city of Lynn very well, for I had gone there frequently to buy shoes. With its thousands of factory workers, it should have the kind of customers we wanted. And the location was fair, for Woolworth and Kresge stores had been operating for some time directly across the street, and there was a department store in the same block.

When we examined the space we found that it consisted of a main floor 40 feet across the front and 90 feet deep, with a basement about half that size. It looked so good to all of us that we took a lease at a rental of $4,000 a year and paid our first month's rent—$333.33.

Now the die was cast! I had a store! A barren, empty store to be sure, but in my mind's eye I could see shelves and counters loaded with a great variety of colorful merchandise.

I could see customers crowding the aisles!

I could even hear the sweet sound of cash registers ringing!

But it was now September and Christmas was only a few weeks away. If we were going to get the benefit of the Christmas trade, I had to get busy!

There she is . . . No. 1, Lynn, as she looked in 1906 . . . all dressed up for the opening, with the gold block letters and bright orange background that was to set the style for her sisters for years to come.

CHAPTER 9

"The First Grant Store Opens"

As I stood in the doorway on that day in September, 1906, and surveyed the space we had taken for our first store, in the Y.M.C.A. building, in Lynn, Massachusetts, it looked like a forest of big round pillars!

To the left at the rear was a raised area reached by a short flight of steps. Just in front of this section a stairway led to the basement.

On the right about halfway back was a freight elevator that had to be pulled up and down by a rope.

Altogether we had about 5,000 square feet of usable floor space, and something less than three months in which to convert it into a store, ready for the Christmas selling season.

With the layout planned on paper, I gave the carpenter specifications for the fixtures. His price was two dollars a running foot for counters and shelving that would cost $25 or $30 a running foot today. Also to be built were window backs and a big sign for the store front.

We purchased second-hand cash registers for about half the price for new ones.

As soon as the carpentry work was under way I was off to Boston and New York on the great adventure of buying the merchandise for the first 25-cent store in America! On goods I had handled in Salem, I knew the sources; on other lines I had the help of buyers at Almy, Bigelow & Washburn.

With the Christmas season uppermost in mind, I concentrated on items appropriate for gifts—handkerchiefs, women's neckwear, men's ties, toiletries, boxed stationery, raffia whiskbroom holders, satin pin-cushions, jewelry, toys.

In New York I literally ran from one place to another, looking for special gift merchandise to buy for 16 to 18 cents so that I could sell it at not more than 25 cents. Then back to the store in Lynn to work with the carpenter, getting shelves and counters properly placed.

When the goods began to arrive, an inexperienced boy was hired to help me open the cases, check the merchandise, mark it and carry it to the counters. The wooden cases were then sold for 25 or 50 cents each.

I painted the signs for the windows and counters, wrote the first advertisement for the *Lynn Item*, and hired about fifteen girls to do the selling.

I can picture some of those girls in my mind now, as clearly as though it were only yesterday.

One was Miss Leutbecker, a little old woman I put on the ribbon counter. And could she sell ribbons! I remember one Saturday night she almost cried her eyes out because she had sold only $99 worth of ribbons when she'd set her heart on selling $100 worth.

Then there was Miss Norris on the notion counter. She turned out to be so good at selling and stock-keeping that eventually I put every new girl with her for the first week or ten days so she would get the right idea of how to make a success of whatever she was assigned to do.

And I well remember Winnie Bond. She sold laces, embroideries and handkerchiefs. She was really good! I saw her just a few years ago and she looked just as she looked when she came to work for me in that first store 40 years ago!

But to get back to the story of getting ready

to open—the all-important outside sign had been completed and erected over the entrance. Into it had gone many hours of careful thought. From the day the name was chosen I had studied styles of lettering on other signs, in magazines and newspapers, and on billboards and street-car cards, until I finally had chosen the one easiest to read—a simple block letter.

Everywhere I went, walking along the streets of Lynn, Boston and New York, riding on trains, I looked for the color that could be seen the farthest. Finally I became convinced that a medium chrome orange was it. The orange fire plugs clinched my decision. Surely if that color had been chosen to make fire plugs stand out so no one could miss them, why wasn't it just the thing for a store sign that would catch the eye? (I understand that scientific studies have since proved that this color can be seen at the greatest distance.)

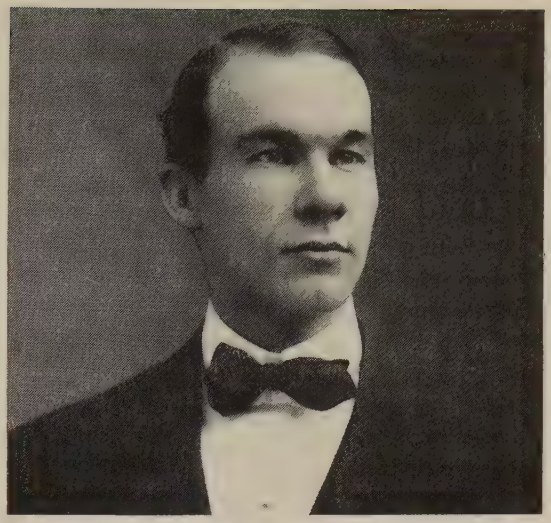
So "W. T. Grant Co." in gold block letters outlined in dark navy blue on an orange background became the pattern for the sign that went up over our first store—and it is still the familiar design marking Grant stores from coast to coast. We have never been able to improve on it.

One of the last steps in preparation for our opening was trimming the windows. This was done several days in advance. It called for everything I knew of showmanship. Into the windows went all the oustanding values I could find to draw people into the store.

At last the great day came. It was Thursday, December 6, 1906. When morning dawned, after a sleepless night for all of us, the city of Lynn was battered and drenched by a wild mixture of wind, snow and rain. Inches of slush underfoot made walking hazardous. The situation was anything but promising!

But when the doors of our store were thrown open at 2:30, we were swamped! A great crowd had been waiting, eager for the tempting values that filled the windows.

As the storm subsided, more and more people came, to look and to buy. All afternoon and evening the store was crowded. When we closed at eleven o'clock that night and checked the cash registers, I found that receipts for the first day totalled $1,500—a fabulous sum to me. The foreboding dark dawn had changed to a day of glorious success!



Yes, this is the 30-year-old, proud owner of a 25¢ Department Store. However, I didn't look so calm and self assured on opening day.

Fifteen hundred dollars—in cash! What should I do with so much money? I had no safe and was fearful that, left in the store, it might be stolen. So I divided the money into three parts, gave a friend one part to take home for the night, hid a second part in the coal bin in the basement, and took the third part home myself.

Nineteen days remained until Christmas. With three Sundays out, that meant sixteen selling days. It was one mad rush for me. I bought more goods, kept the books, paid the bills, carried money to the bank, wrote the ads, set up displays, painted the signs, and all the while set a pace that kept the salesgirls going at top speed. I was my own porter and handyman, sweeping the floors and washing the windows. Another of my duties each

If I seem to take undue credit for my showmanship, let me repeat: "I didn't take it from the dust." My father was a master of the art. That's him on left, helping a friend post bills. I shouldn't wonder if this photo was the inspiration for the donkey cart I later used for advertising.

day was to replace the carbons in the electric arc lights in front of the store at the risk of getting electrocuted.

Pausing only for a bite to eat after the store closed, I was back setting up new displays, arranging goods on the counters, bringing up more stock from the basement for the next day. Some nights I slept on a counter because it was too late to catch a train or trolley to East Saugus where I was getting free board and lodging at my brother's home.

My own enthusiasm, the fever of activity in which I worked, seemed to inspire everyone to pitch in to make the store a success. The people at the bank and at the newspaper office gave me invaluable assistance. The customers told their friends about the bargains we offered and urged them to come and see for themselves. Many customers took such a personal interest that they would have been offended if anyone had criticized the store in any way.

But most wonderful of all to me, in that first store, were the salesgirls. They caught the spirit and worked with me to make the store successful. They gave me continuous help and advice about the merchandise, rushing up to tell me that some certain item was making a hit, or telling me why certain items would not sell.

I give the salesgirls a lion's share of the credit for helping me to make that first store a success. If it had not been for them there wouldn't be any W. T. Grant Company as we know it today. That is why I am everlastingly boosting for the sales people.

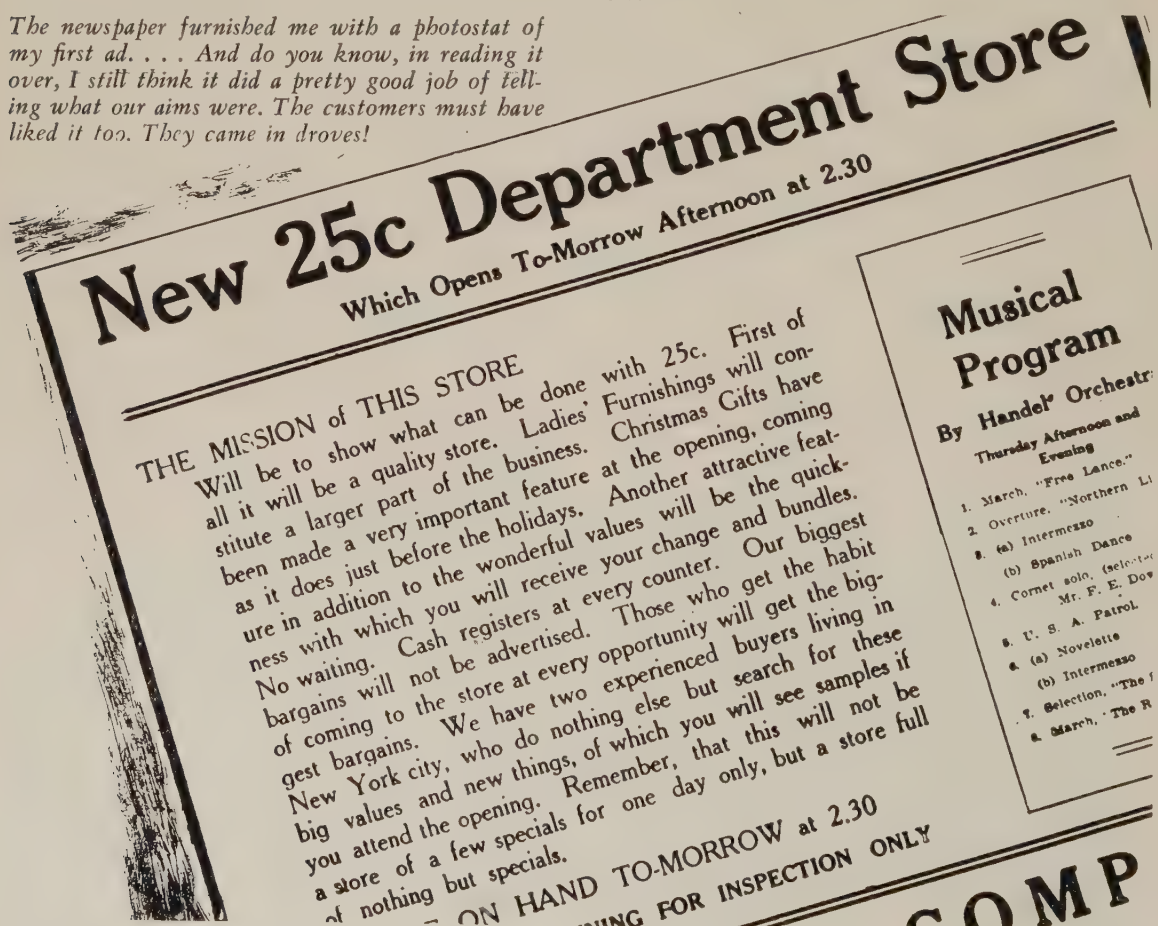
Finally the night before Christmas came. The store looked as though a cyclone had struck it. Our stock was almost entirely sold. No question about it—the store was a mess!

When I came to clean up on Christmas day, I was suddenly overwhelmed with the problems that lay before me. We had all been so absorbed in selling and so excited during that Christmas season rush that there had been no time to think about what we would do after Christmas.

No new merchandise had been ordered to replace our depleted stock. That Christmas day, our counters were so bare that we unrolled bolts of yard goods and spread the material out on the counters to conceal their emptiness. Christmas night I took the train to New York to buy more merchandise, carrying all I could back with me to have on hand the following morning.

Now I was faced squarely with the question that had begun to bother me as I thought of the after-Christmas letdown: "Where do we go from here?"

The newspaper furnished me with a photostat of my first ad. . . . And do you know, in reading it over, I still think it did a pretty good job of telling what our aims were. The customers must have liked it too. They came in droves!



New 25c Department Store

Which Opens To-Morrow Afternoon at 2.30

THE MISSION of THIS STORE Will be to show what can be done with 25c. First of all it will be a quality store. Ladies' Furnishings will constitute a larger part of the business. Christmas Gifts have been made a very important feature at the opening, coming as it does just before the holidays. Another attractive feature in addition to the wonderful values will be the quickness with which you will receive your change and bundles. No waiting. Cash registers at every counter. Our biggest bargains will not be advertised. Those who get the habit of coming to the store at every opportunity will get the biggest bargains. We have two experienced buyers living in New York city, who do nothing else but search for these big values and new things, of which you will see samples if you attend the opening. Remember, that this will not be a store of a few specials for one day only, but a store full of nothing but specials.

ON HAND TO-MORROW at 2.30

ING FOR INSPECTION ONLY

Musical Program

By Handel Orchestr

Thursday Afternoon and Evening

1. March, "Free Lance."
2. Overture, "Northern Li
3. (a) Intermezzo
   (b) Spanish Dance
4. Cornet solo, (selected
   Mr. F. E. Dow
5. U. S. A. Patrol
6. (a) Novelette
   (b) Intermezzo
7. Selection, "The
8. March, "The R

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CHAPTER 10

"We Became Known For Sensational Merchandise"

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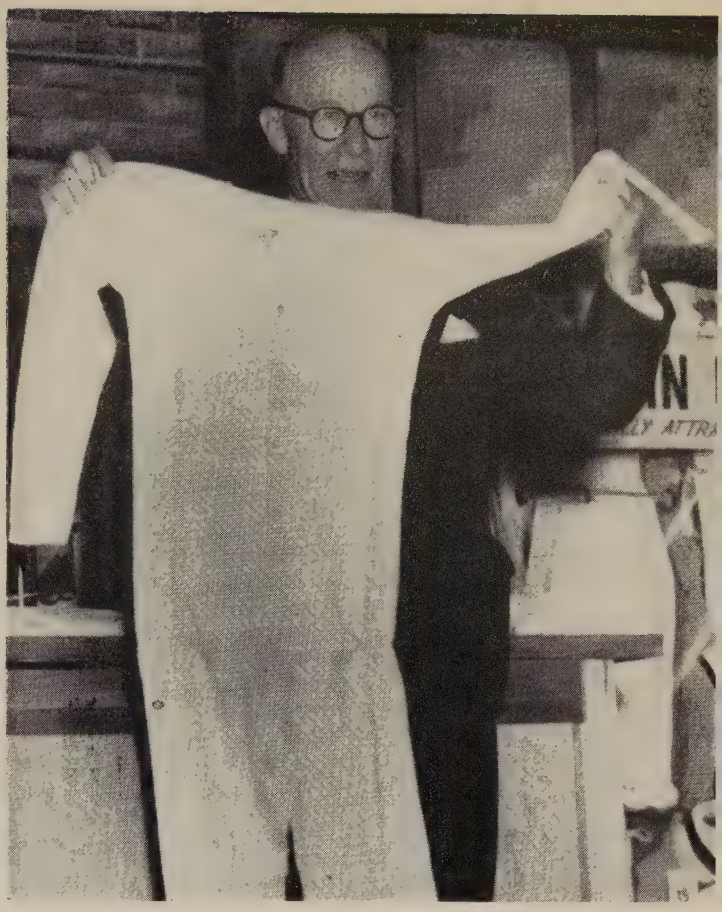


When our Company celebrated its 40th Anniversary, customers sent in items they had bought in my first store at Lynn. Here's one form-fitting, brillo-lined, complete with trap door and only 25¢.

The Christmas season of 1906 over, in our first little store in Lynn, Massachusetts, I was right back with the problem that Mr. Roskoff and I had discussed so many times when we were planning the store. The novelty of a 25-cent store had caught the public's fancy, but now I had practically to start all over to build a business that would attract customers throughout the year.

That meant finding merchandise in a wide enough variety to justify calling ours a department store. The honeymoon was over. Now I had to find goods that would sell during the dreary days of January, February and March—which is still one of our big problems.

In the week between Christmas and New Year, off I went to New York. I knew that I must have sensational bargains at 25 cents, and that to get them I must buy, so far as possible, direct from manufacturers so I would get the lowest possible price.

I knew practically nothing about more than half the merchandise I needed. So I went to the manufacturers in these fields and put myself in their hands, telling them about our wonderful new kind of store, about the great success of our operation, about the tremendous volume of business that was only waiting around the corner. My optimism evidently was so great that our store was made to seem far larger and more important than cold facts would have justified.

Some manufacturers refused at first to sell me direct, but I kept at them with such persistence that my appeals for help brought remarkable results. I would ask for their discarded goods, their seconds and their overstocks and samples.

"I want to give our customers," I would say, "values such as they have never seen before."

The manufacturers would bring out items that I could see at once would be sensational when displayed in our windows.

From a millinery house I bought a lot of big silk roses that had been retailing at two dollars each. Our customers were so excited about them that it soon seemed as though they were decorating half the women's hats in Lynn.

Feather boas had gone out of fashion, but I bought an entire lot that had originally been priced at five dollars to ten dollars. They almost caused a riot when I put them on sale at 25 cents When I explained to manufacturers that I depended upon them to guide me in getting the best-selling merchandise, they went to extremes in selecting items that would be exceptional values at 25 cents. I gave them my confidence, took their

advice and they never failed me. Without their help we never could have made the progress we did in our first store; in fact, they were vitally important in giving the new venture a real chance for success.

I discovered that however important special values were, even more important were the relations existing between me and everyone I dealt with—manufacturers fully as much as salesgirls and customers. I made these manufacturers my friends and went back to them again and again, giving them as much as possible of my business.

We are still buying from some of them today—I. B. Kleinert Rubber Co., for example. And Thomas Long, J. B. Williams, Century Ribbon Company, Lamport Manufacturing Co., Henry Schanzer, Spool Cotton Co., and A. Wilhelm, to mention the ones which come to mind readily. We did business with them in that first store in Lynn, and we're still doing business with them.

On my first and subsequent trips to New York I began gradually to build up a wider variety of merchandise that gave the store increasingly a semblance of the department store we had planned. We were constantly experimenting to learn just what departments would appeal most. For example, we had not intended to have a notion department, but when we found customers expected it, we put it in. Only by trial and error could we find out what customers wanted most, and their judgment was final.

Some of the values offered in that first store are almost unbelievable today. For example, steel-bone corsets with hose supporters attached for 25 cents—and they were really good merchandise! Long petticoats of flannelette, sateen and muslin sold at the same tempting price. Yes, even dresses. They were Mother Hubbard calico affairs. You really couldn't call them dresses, but at least they covered a woman completely!

Then we had women's muslin drawers, open and closed, and corset covers, all trimmed with lace and embroidery. Women's ribbed underwear and lisle hose were on our counters also.

In the millinery department we had all sorts of trimmings, including artificial flowers and ostrich feathers at unheard-of-prices. Other regular stock included yard goods, art needlework, decorative combs and hair switches.

Laces and embroideries were good items right from the start. Here again I was fortunate in having the help of a friend who worked for a manufacturer. This time it was Rex Levy of the firm of Einstein-Woolf. (Incidentally the senior partner of this firm was a brother of the famous Professor Albert Einstein.) Knowing my need for "sensational values," Rex would go over their line of embroideries and say: "Here's a good lot for you." "No, lay off that one." "Here's one your customers will like." He showed me which embroideries were the best buys. Over the years, as our chain of stores grew, we continued to buy from Einstein-Woolf.

We also had some hardware and home-furnishing items. Wash boilers at 25 cents were a great drawing card.

For men we had pipes, neckties, gloves, socks, garters, underwear and suspenders.

That last item taught me a lesson. I had bought some suspenders ridiculously cheap and they sold quickly. But a customer brought back a pair, saying he could not wear them because the "V" at the back rode way up on his neck. It was easy to understand why the manufacturer had sold them so cheap—they had been cut wrong. After that I made it a rule to have someone try on every article of wearing apparel I bought to make sure it was made right.

Always on my buying trips I was on the lookout for specials. On one occasion I bought 20,000 sample handkerchiefs, regularly retailing for 25 to 50 cents. We sold them at 5 and 10 cents each. Again we almost had a riot in the store! We could have sold them for more, but I could afford to sell them at these prices—and our reputation was being built on how much we could *give* rather than how much we could *get*.

One of my early bargain buys for men was five gross of razors that had some minor defect which had been removed by grinding down the cutting edge. They had been priced originally at $3 and $4 each, but I got them at such low cost that I could feature them at 25 cents. The five gross was sold out in one day. After that we repeated the razor sale every 60 days, whenever I could get them.

Still another time, through a fortunate buy, we had seconds of ladies' long kid evening gloves, regularly priced at several dollars, and we sold a few hundred pairs at 25 cents a pair in a couple of hours.

One of the most popular bargains we ever offered in that first store was sample Nottingham lace curtains. I would buy manufacturers' samples consisting of one curtain only, that is, a curtain for one side of a window. These curtains were beautiful merchandise, a $2 or $3 value for the pair, but we sold them at 25 cents a single curtain. Women would pore over the stock looking for two curtains as nearly alike as possible and use them as a pair, getting a great value at 50 cents.

Repeatedly the friendships I had established with manufacturers, wholesalers and importers enabled me to get sensational values for my customers. One of these friends was Charley Kaiser of Morimura Brothers in New York, importers of Japanese goods. When I first told him I wanted to buy direct, he protested, "But we don't sell to little stores like yours."

I told him about the tremendous volume we

sold whenever we could get a real bargain and he finally agreed to try selling us once. He sold us ten cases of assorted china. An average case contained 500 pieces and cost us $62.50, or 12½ cents per piece. Each case included a few large pieces such as chocolate pots and cake plates that would sell in the ordinary china store for $2 or $3.

When the first shipment arrived, I put a case right into the window, open to show the packing. Then I took the contents of another case and filled the base of the window. A big sign announced: "Anything in this window—25 cents!"

Many of the pieces were such bargains that crowds gathered on the sidewalk. Word of the sale spread like wildfire. Of course the large pieces were taken first, but the entire assortment sold the first day, except for some of the smaller items which we had to mark down to 10 cents. We came out with a fair profit—besides creating a sensation.

When I told Charley Kaiser what had happened he was convinced that he had a customer who could move goods. After that first experience he picked out cases for us that would afford the best assortments for a store with a 25-cent limit.

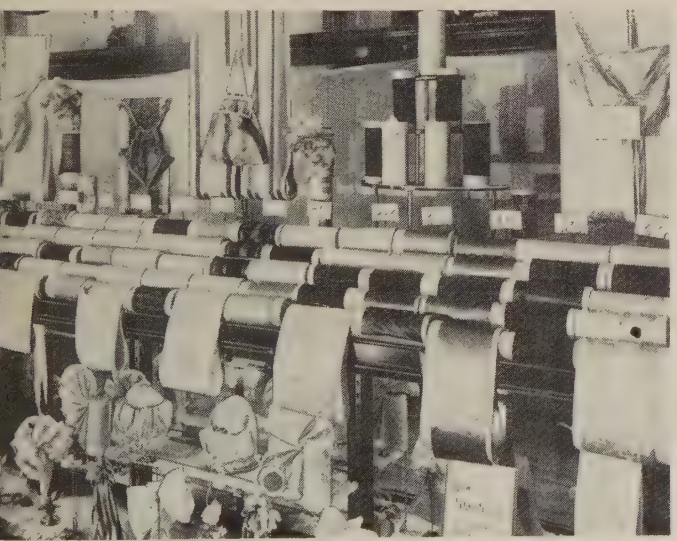
After we had several stores, I would go into his office and he would say: "Don't buy ten cases at a time. I've just been going over the invoices and have picked out 100 cases just right for your stores. Take them all and we'll ship them when and where you want them. If you can't use them all we'll take them back."

With his help in selecting the right merchandise, our sales of Japanese china became a feature of each store we added to our chain for years afterward. I often wonder how much of this china is still on shelves in homes in the U. S. A. No doubt some day it will be sold as antique and bring high prices.

Another man who gave me invaluable help in those early days was Mr. Leo Platt of the Century Ribbon Mills. He not only suggested the best numbers to buy but taught us how to sell ribbons. When I would go in to buy 25 or 50 pieces of ribbon he would say: "Let me tell you what we'll do. We will send you 500 pieces—and also send a girl to the store to show you how to display ribbons. She will show your sales people how to tie ribbon bows for millinery and dress trimmings. If you don't sell all of the 500 pieces, don't worry. We will take back any roll you haven't cut into."

As a result we would sell, not the 25 pieces or 50 I had originally planned to buy—but 350 or 400 pieces. The methods of ribbon display and demonstration that we learned from Leo Platt of the Century Ribbon Company in that first store are still an important merchandising method in Grant stores.

We had become "known for values"—really sensational values!



Laces and embroideries were good items right from the start. And look at all those ribbons . . . did they sell! One reason for their success was the method of display we learned from our suppliers.

CHAPTER 11

"I Become A Merchant-Showman"

Between buying trips for the first Grant store, in Lynn, Massachusetts, back in 1907 I was constantly looking for ways to get more excitement, more activity into the store itself.

From my earliest experiences in retailing I had observed the importance of showmanship. By that I mean dramatizing merchandise in its arrangement and display so as to make it "come alive" and have the greatest attention value for the customer.

I had not forgotten that experience in making a success of the bargain table at Houghton & Dutton's, and so, in this first store I put a bargain table right inside the front door. On that table I put the merchandise that seemed to me to have the greatest and most exciting attention value—a very real bargain. But that table served its purpose only so long as it was surrounded by customers eagerly buying what was offered. If interest died down in that merchandise, I would immediately remove it and substitute something else. I would change the merchandise three or four times a day if necessary, in order to sustain interest in that bargain counter.

Then I would repeatedly ask the salesgirls if the items in the window were selling in the store. If they were not creating sales, I would take those items out and put others in their place.

I did not like too many printed signs for display windows because they do not look "special." It always seemed to me that a window should have news value—the merchandise should have just arrived, or be something just reduced, or in some way have a fresh value. Therefore, for the display sign, I would take a crayon and letter or write the message so that it would be fresh and exciting and really get customers' attention.

Showmanship is based on an understanding of what catches the customer's imagination. I realize today that we cannot expect every one to have that sense of merchandising and display. Therefore, we cannot make a rule that every store *must* have a bargain counter. It would be a mistake to do so. Because not every store manager is enthusiastic about bargain counters. Nor is he fast enough in judgment to know how to change merchandise and keep a display alive. It is important, however, to make available to all stores the best ideas that some stores have developed.

I might add that as the number of our stores increased over the next few years, we reached a point where we had to put in a standardized system of window and store displays. We set up, at our headquarters office, model windows and model department and counter displays; photographed them, and sent them out so that the stores could have the benefit of those who had obtained the best results. And we still do.

Because the type of merchandise we had in that first store in Lynn did not always lend itself to colorful display, we had to resort to other methods. On Saturday afternoons and evenings, for instance, we hired a pianist for our sheet-music department. Popular music played hour after hour—loud enough so that it could be heard out on the sidewalk—added gaiety to the store atmosphere. Also, it helped to sell great quantities of sheet music at 10 cents a copy!

One day it struck me that we should also have a singer, so I put a sign in the window: "Wanted—Male Contralto." A good many people must have restrained their amusement before someone came

in and said: "Don't you know that a contralto is a woman?"

I don't know where I had picked up the word contralto. Anyway, I changed the sign and soon had an ambitious young man singing in the music department. It gave a liveliness to the store that is part of showmanship.

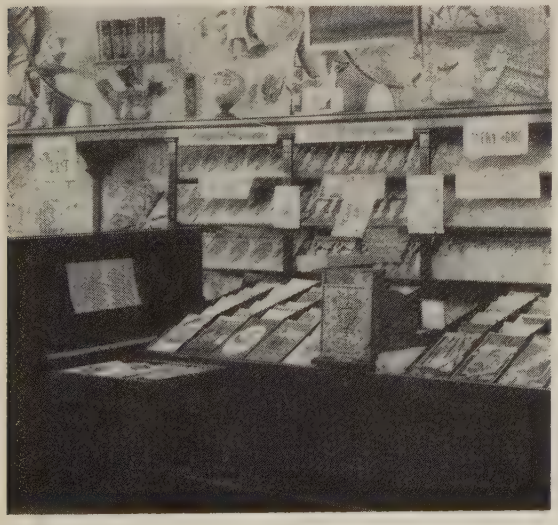
At last we got through the months of January, February and March. Then Spring came with a demand for ribbons, neckwear, jewelry, millinery and toilet goods—all those things that women shop for at Easter time and as the Spring and Summer seasons approach. With our values we had a Christmas rush all over again.

Our toilet goods department was fast becoming a sales and profit maker. Today's biggest seller—lipstick—had not yet come into use, but we sold vast quantities of face powder, toilet water, and soaps. Wrisley's and Colgate's Cashmere Bouquet were great favorites in those days.

At the toilet counter I recalled an experience of the past and applied it to the promotion of a 10-cent sample vial of good perfume.

While with Houghton & Dutton, at the Mechanics Fair held annually in Mechanics Hall in Boston, I had watched with fascination a pitchman by the name of B. B. Johns selling stove polish. For demonstration purposes he used a miniature stove which he kept red hot. His selling talk and dramatic movements never stopped.

"Here you are, ladies, an amazing new invention —a stove polish you can apply when your stove is red hot or when your stove is cold. It makes your stove a thing of beauty with this glossy, enamel-like, long-lasting finish." And so on and on, while deftly applying a coat of polish to the red-hot stove.



To help sell sheet music, we hired a pianist who added considerably to the gaiety of the store. What's more our musicians were generally loud enough to be heard outside.

When I think of the merchandise we offered our customers for only 25¢ . . . it's no wonder our windows always created interest! At one time, we even displayed Diamonds.

Now, polishing a stove while it is red hot makes about as much practical sense as writing with a fountain pen under water, but B. B. Johns' stunt did the trick—it got attention.

When I saw how he gathered in the dimes after each demonstration, I said to myself, "Here's a way I can make some money." I managed to get a small booth right next to B. B. Johns and spent every evening there during the remainder of the Fair. My meagre capital had been invested in a few gallons of good but inexpensive perfume and a large quantity of small bottles. Johns and I quickly established a system of neighborly cooperation. As soon as he had finished his talk, I was right up front offering my dime to start the buying of his stove polish.

A few minutes later I gathered my own crowd, hawking my "rare imported perfume" at only 10 cents for a sample vial. If customers hung back, B. B. Johns was always ready to lead them with an eager purchase of two bottles.

There at the Mechanics Fair I had had convincing proof of the power of demonstration—and we put it to full use at the perfume counter in that first store. One of our Lynn girls with a durable voice advertised our perfume in tones that reached to all parts of the store. In fact, we went one step further—we sprayed the air around the counter with fragrance as an added lure. Often we sold more than 500 vials of perfume during a single Saturday afternoon and evening.

Today this is a common practice even in department stores; and counter demonstrations are a

feature of almost every type of retail outlet. B. B. Johns, whose clever selling at the Mechanics Fair had so intrigued me, later sold his stove polish in Grant Stores all over the country, often spending a whole month in one store. Demonstrations that are properly controlled add a lot of life to a store.

For the Fall and Winter selling seasons we added several new lines of merchandise: woolen mittens, men's and women's heavy underwear, knitted cardigan jackets, women's knitted petticoats, children's stocking caps, jackets, infants' sweaters and knitted bootees.

In our footwear department we had an assortment of slippers at 25 cents a pair and, occasionally, rubbers.

In children's clothes we had great success with dresses, panty waists, rompers, and boys' cotton and corduroy pants, all selling at a quarter.

About half of our basement was devoted to selling. There we had piece goods, home-furnishing items, toys, and an everchanging variety of bargain merchandise sometimes bought at fire underwriters' sales—anything to keep the store a place where customers were sure to find bargains.

Nearly half of our total week's business was done on Saturdays. At noon on Saturday the shoe factories would let out and the customers would start coming in crowds. This would continue right up until we closed. I might mention that our closing hour was flexible. Some nights it was 10, some nights 10:30, and some nights 11. It all depended on whether there were customers in the store! For Saturday afternoon and evening we had extra sales girls.

I'd like to stop a minute to tell about these extra girls. They didn't get any regular pay, but a 5 percent commission on their sales. That meant if they sold $10 worth of merchandise during the afternoon and evening they were paid 50 cents, 75¢ if they sold $15 worth, and so on up to $1.50 if they sold $30 worth. And some of them did. They were the ones I could depend on to show up every Saturday afternoon. Whereas usually the $10 girls didn't come back.

I knew there were only two ways in which I could make the store show a profit—by selling as many goods as possible at a mark-up 10 percent higher than my cost of doing business, and by keeping our expenses as low as possible.

That wasn't all. An enthusiastic salesman who travelled throughout New England came in to the Lynn store one day with what to me was a startling idea. He said: "There's a wonderful opportunity for a store like this in Waterbury, Connecticut! Why don't you open one there?"

The fact that I had the backing of partners of Almy, Bigelow & Washburn helped me to get credit. Terms at that time were 2 to 8 percent off for payment in 10 days, with 60 days extra at slightly less discount. In the begining, with my limited capital I just had to have that 60 days, by which time we might have the benefit of two or three turnovers before I had to pay for the first shipment.

When I started that first store I set up a very simple formula for making it pay. I estimated that my expenses would be 15 percent of sales, and that I should allow 5 percent for markdowns and losses that I couldn't foresee, and 5 percent for profit. Therefore, if the markup on the goods I bought was 25 percent I should be able to give real values and be sure of the 5 percent net profit. Putting this formula to work, I found I actually came out with a profit on sales of about 8 percent.

The only way I could hold expenses to 15 percent was by economizing in every possible way. I did not spend a dollar or even a dime for anything that could be improvised with what we had. For example, instead of buying window display fixtures we would make them out of boxes and pails covered with scarves. Two sticks tacked together made T stands. They served the purpose —and cost practically nothing.

I never hired anybody to do what I could possibly do myself. For 15 to 18 hours a day I was on the job, never for a moment letting down in my effort to make the store a success.

Said a neighboring businessman: "Nobody has any right to work as hard as that fellow Grant. He'll kill himself if he keeps this up."

But thanks to the sturdy strength my days with Timmy Kearns had given me, and thanks to the conviction that this was my one great chance, I kept up the pace. After all, this was my store—the store I had dreamed about. Never in all the years since have I had more excitement or more satisfaction than in those early days of the Grant Company.

At the end of that first year our sales totalled $99,000. This new kind of store had won a place of distinction among the retail establishments of Lynn, Massachusetts.

CHAPTER 12

"We Open Our Second Store"

One day years later, I was discussing our first Lynn store with a business friend. "Let's see," he commented, "You opened that first store in December, 1906. Your first full year was 1907—the year of the panic. Didn't that present some additional problems?"

"Frankly," I confessed, "I never realized there had been a panic until I heard about it ten years afterward!"

And that was the gospel truth. During those hectic years of 1907 and 1908 that store of mine was the world to me. Completely absorbed in my own problems, I seldom even read a newspaper; never discussed "business conditions" with anybody. So I never knew that the Knickerbocker Trust Company had failed in New York, starting a chain reaction of financial failures and unemployment that extended clear across the country. All I knew was that the market was full of distress merchandise that we could buy at bargain prices and offer our customers sensational values. That meant good business for us, as fortunately we were not stocked up on old merchandise and we could therefore take advantage of the special values offered to us.

Roskoff had lost interest in our venture. He was too busy running the Almy, Bigelow & Washburn business. So I was virtually on my own.

I might add here parenthetically that eventually I was able to buy out all of my partners. Then, in 1928, needing capital to expand the business and open more stores, stock was put on sale to the investing public and the W. T. Grant Co. was listed on the Stock Exchange. Today there are approximately 6500 stockholders.

But to return to the Lynn store, my salesgirls were proving so capable of carrying the work on while I was away that I began thinking about that salesman's suggestion of a similar store in Waterbury, Connecticut. So, on one of my buying trips to New York, I decided to run up to Waterbury and look the town over. To do this it was necessary to get off the train at New Haven, wait for an interurban trolley that ran to a point near Waterbury, then change to another trolley into the city.

On my first inspection trip I found that Waterbury was a community somewhat isolated from other metropolitan centers, a city of fine homes and substantial families, with a large population of well-paid workers. It was also the trading center for a prosperous surrounding territory. It should be a good place for a Grant store. My recommendation was made to my partners in Salem—Mrs. Almy, Bigelow and Roskoff. They agreed that I should search the town for suitable space. I did this during several successive trips.

Because of our limited capital, low rental was important. Therefore I had to find a location away from the best shopping center, and depend on showmanship and exceptional values to attract customers. The property I finally chose involved dealing with two landlords and presented formidable problems of construction to convert it into a store.

On Bank Street I took what formerly had been Tierney's meat market. It had only a 19-foot front but it widened to 40 feet as it ran back for more than 100 feet. By building a bridge, we could connect this with a much larger area on the

The store above is old #2, Waterbury, first link in the Grant chain. Quite a small link, I must admit, when compared with the magnificent modern Grant store now serving Waterbury (see photo, on next page), but it was the success of this little store that gave me courage to open others of its kind.

second floor of a building in the rear. The combined area totalled about 15,000 square feet of selling space, plus a large basement stockroom—four times what we had in Lynn.

I had quite a job selling Mr. Tierney on making a lease that would allow us to connect the two buildings. I had to guarantee that a fire-proof door would be closed every night on the proposed bridge to protect his property against the danger of fire in the large back part of the store.

I shall never forget my feelings as I walked to the station the night after making this lease. I felt that I was the loneliest man in the world. I didn't know a soul in the town. Every merchant would be against me. I had made a reasonable success of establishing one store, but now I had set myself the task of doing it all over on a much larger scale, and of running two stores—far apart. But the die was cast, and I knew that I must win out here, no matter what the cost in time and effort.

Immediately I began thinking about the new problems which a second store presented. One of those problems was finding a manager. On one of my stops in New Haven I had gone around town visiting the 5-and-10 cent stores looking for ideas. A major mystery to me was how such stores controlled their buying so that stocks were maintained. How would our two stores know when and where to order, except through me?

I did not venture to ask for this information in the Woolworth or Kresge store in New Haven, but I did go into the Bush-Smith 5-and-10 cent store, one of a small chain with stores in several cities. Introducing myself to the manager, a big, tall man by the name of Pete Meyer, I told him about the successful store we had in Lynn, Massachusetts, and about our plan to open a much larger store in Waterbury. Not to be outdone by my seeming importance, Pete Meyer proceeded to tell me about his own experience as a chain store merchant. He had worked for several chains and knew their methods well. He seemed so eager to impress me with his own importance that when I asked him how he knew what to order, he hastened to show me his "list book." This was an entirely new idea to me, and I saw at once how practical it was—a book in which was listed every item in the store, with all the necessary information for ordering.

As we talked, I began to realize that Pete and I were doing a pretty good job of selling each other. Here, perhaps, was the man I was looking for to manage the Waterbury store. To Pete, the prospect of managing a new and bigger store was obviously a dream about to come true.

On my next stopover in New Haven, the deal was made. Pete Meyer was engaged as the manager for our second store.

After months of construction, buying, and planning for the opening, the day finally arrived. And what an opening that was!

Out of that hodge-podge of space, we had made a big colorful store, filled with such a variety of merchandise, and such exciting values as the people of Waterbury never had seen before. All the specials that had been so successful in Lynn were there—the Nottingham lace curtains, the Japanese china, the re-ground razors—and lots of new ones, including wash boilers and Stillson wrenches, truly remarkable values at 25 cents.

We had a much larger piece-goods department, with values made possible by a new friend, Billy Dayton, who had a piece-goods remnant business in New York and who had rounded up for us great quantities of yard goods at unbelievably low prices. Then we had a large hardware department and a good variety of home furnishings.

As a very special feature, we had a marble soda fountain—the first in a Grant store—where we served delicious ice cream sodas at five cents.

Because of our poor location, we had to resort to every conceivable device for drawing people to the store. In Waterbury I learned these five lessons about attracting trade:

1. You must have noise.
2. You must have motion.
3. You must have color.
4. You must lift things *up*.
5. You must dramatize the *new* and the *special values*.

For many days before the opening, our front windows had been completely covered with paper and on each window was painted a gigantic question mark. This aroused curiosity and stimulated

Here's #2, Waterbury, as it looks today. Big stores from little links do grow!

speculation, as no one could get a look into the store to see what was going on.

As opening day drew near we changed the signs to read: "A New Kind of Store—A Department Store With Nothing Over 25 Cents."

A few days before the opening we started advertising in the newspapers, announcing the day and hour the doors would swing wide.

Just before the all-important day arrived we took down the paper from the windows, revealing an array of tempting merchandise.

A band, hired for the occasion, could be heard for blocks around. The crowd was so great that we had to call on the police for help, and when at last we opened the doors the people poured in, filling every aisle.

The excitement was terrific. The band supplied the needed "noise." There was motion—a candy-making machine drew a fascinated crowd. Everywhere were signs with the magic word—"NEW" Every special value was displayed and dramatized so that customers could not miss it.

One bit of excitement that opening day might well have been serious. Right in the center of the bridge between the two parts of the store we had put a bargain table piled high with one of our traditional specials—those sample Nottingham lace curtains at 25 cents each, only one curtain of a kind.

There was a mad scramble of customers trying to pick out two of reasonably similar design for a pair. In the confusion two women got hold of the same curtain and each proceeded to pull and tug at her prize, claiming that she had been the first to find it. One of these customers was holding in her other hand a big wash boiler she had just bought for 25 cents in the home-furnishings department. With this she began to wham the other customer.

The two women were fast attracting a crowd and our gala opening was in danger of seeing bloodshed, when Billy Dayton, on hand to help in our piece-goods department, saved the day. He laughed so loud at the spectacle that the crowd joined him. The fight ended right there.

It was rather more excitement than I had figured on. But it did prove that the growing Grant business had pulling power!

CHAPTER 13

"We Begin To Have Growing Pains"

The second Grant store, which we had opened in Waterbury, Connecticut, on October 17, 1908, was a sensational success—but also a relentless master. At least 18 hours out of each 24 I was utterly and exclusively devoted to sustaining that success.

Seven days a week I gave the two stores everything I had—and then some! I went to no parties, no meetings, no luncheons, no dinners, did no visiting with anybody.

Our newest venture was attracting attention in the retail trade, but I wrote no articles, made no speeches. I had no social life and did not want any. I lived in a hotel room and went from bed to business and from business to bed. I would not spend any time on anything that did not in some way contribute to the building of the business.

I do not say that this was wise—but in those days it was necessary. I had undertaken a business venture more demanding than anything I had foreseen, and I simply *had* to carry the load, at the same time making frequent trips to New York and to Lynn. In this second store I had very little assistance other than from the salesgirls. They were wonderful.

Yes, we had hired a store manager in Pete Meyer, who brought in ideas which we used not only in Waterbury but in other stores as the chain grew. His "list book," in particular, was a great help and is in use in our stores today. Out of his experience in 5-and-10 cent chains we learned methods we would otherwise have had to discover by trial and error. He introduced new departments and showed us how to handle successfully many small lines with which he was familiar.

I sincerely wish that Pete had possessed all the other qualities so necessary in a store manager. He would have gone far in our business. But gradually I was finding that Pete was adding to my problems instead of reducing them. He had a fatal fault—he could not get along with people. He made enemies at his boarding-house. He made enemies of the store's employees and its customers.

So many people complained to me about him, insisting he was hurting our business, that I decided reluctantly that Pete would have to go. And that presented the greatest problem of all.

Pete was physically so much bigger than myself, and so wild-looking when angry, that I wondered how I could ever face him with the fact that he was through. Fearing that he would become fighting mad, I decided on a precaution. When decisive action could be postponed no longer, I walked around through the hardware department, picked up a wooden hammer handle and held it behind my back. Then, screwing up my courage, I broke the fatal news to Pete.

To my vast relief he took it calmly. He must have known it was due. Evidently he had been through similar experiences with other employers. Anyway, Pete and I parted good friends, and I have never forgotten the real help he gave me at a time when I needed it most.

That experience with Pete taught me two valu-

In 1951, we opened a big new Waterbury Store and I was presented with a key to the city. Funny, but all during the ceremony, my mind kept darting back to the opening in 1908. What a difference!

able lessons—the necessity of choosing men for store management with great care as to all their qualifications, and the corresponding need for a method of compensation that would serve as a continuous incentive to success.

The method of selecting men was worked out gradually over a long period. The method of compensation was put into effect at once.

This provided that the manager should have a bonus of 20 per cent of the profits of the store, with a $30-a-week drawing account. Thus he would be virtually in business for himself without making an investment. All his energies and resourcefulness would be concentrated on increasing sales and holding down expenses, for only in that way could he make a profit for the store and himself.

That plan has remained the basis of compensation for our store managers to this day, and the years have demonstrated its fundamental soundness.

Forty-three years later, in 1951 I went to Waterbury to be present at the official opening of our new Grant store, enormous by comparison with that first store, beautiful in design and decoration, a symbol of the great advances our company has made.

In contrast to my sense of utter loneliness that night after making my first lease, there was now

I wasn't alone with my memories. These members of the original Waterbury crew were on hand in 1951 to remind me how I flew up and down the aisles getting ready for the first opening of #2.

an elaborate celebration breakfast and the Mayor of Waterbury graciously presented me with a key to the city. I was profoundly aware of the changes time had brought. When we opened our first Waterbury store we had 30 employees; in the new one we had 400. But at that pre-opening party were seven women whose presence meant even more to me than that of the Mayor and the key. They were women who, as salesgirls, helped me start that original Waterbury store 43 years before. Also in that group were 25 people who had worked with us in Waterbury for 20 to 25 years.

It was appropriate that our company should have built this new store in Waterbury, for though I did not realize it at the time, our first store in that city marked the beginning of the Grant chain. When, after a few months, it turned out to be such a substantial success, it gave me courage to start thinking about a third store, and my attention centered on a larger city through which I had passed so many times on my way to New York—Bridgeport, Connecticut.

Today we have an efficient Real Estate Department, but for many years the choosing of locations for Grant stores and the making of leases were my personal responsibility. Picking a city in which to establish a store may be relatively easy. Finding a suitable location for the store in that city is a far more difficult task.

Through the first ten years of our history, during which we opened 36 stores, I traveled not only throughout New England and down the Atlantic Coast, but also through the Central States and as far West as Texas, visiting cities again and again, searching for sites, talking to property owners, and working out the details of our leases.

By the time I turned this job over to our newly established Real Estate Department, I not only had a pretty thorough acquaintance with many business communities, but I had become a fairly good lawyer, so far as making leases was concerned.

In the course of this work I had many interesting experiences. For example, we rented our store in Fall River, Massachusetts, from Lizzie Borden, who later was tried for killing her father and mother with an ax, and became the principal figure in one of the most famous murder trials of modern times. Also she inspired someone to write a currently popular hit of doggerel verse:

> Lizzie Borden took an ax
> And gave her father forty whacks
> When she saw what she had done
> She gave her mother forty one.

Fortunately I did business with her agent, not with Lizzie herself!

On another occasion, while visiting my brother in Northampton, Massachusetts, I received a lease about which I needed some professional legal advice. My brother suggested a lawyer who lived across the street from him in half of a double house.

The lawyer turned out to be Calvin Coolidge, who was then in the Massachusetts legislature. He was very happy to accommodate me and, after an hour's discussion I asked him how much I owed him. He said, "A dollar and a half wouldn't be too much, would it?" and I agreed that it wouldn't.

Of course neither of us at the time had any idea that my dollar-and-a-half lawyer would eventually be President of the United States.

A similar case occurred with attorney James G. Johnson, of Philadelphia, who later commanded some of the highest attorney fees ever paid. He corrected a lease for me for $5.00.

Most of our early stores were located in something less than the best business districts, where we had to draw customers with our unusual values and ingenious promotions. We refused to burden a store from the beginning with a rental which might handicap us in showing a profit. Rather, we worked on the basis then that a Grant store had to make a profit in its first year.

Of course we were also somewhat timid in those early days because we had not yet developed what we considered a sure formula for success, but gradually as we got more and more courage and confidence, we went into better and better locations.

We're opening some wonderful stores these days, many with fine parking facilities. But I sometimes feel sorry for the opening crews of such stores. They'll never know the thrill of having crowds block off the trolley line.

CHAPTER 14

"We Invade Bridgeport, Connecticut"

Of all our early stores, none gave me more trouble in making a lease than our third store, that in Bridgeport, Connecticut. When our success in Waterbury gave us the courage to move into this much larger city, I made many visits to Bridgeport, looking over the business district, searching for a space we could afford, yet one to which we might hope to attract sufficient customers.

I had not been long engaged in this search when I made the acquaintance of Mr. Sam Wheeler, of the firm of Wheeler & Wilson, manufacturers of sewing machines. He was a wealthy man and an extensive property owner. At the time he was building the Stratfield Hotel at one end of the main street, and word was going around that S. Poli, who owned a chain of vaudeville theatres in New England, New York and Pennsylvania, was planning to build a theatre beyond the new hotel. Also it was reported that a bridge was to be built over the river just beyond.

This area was not then a particularly good location for a store, but such activity indicated to me that the business district was moving in that direction. At least it was a better location than we had in Waterbury, and we had demonstrated there that we could attract trade with a store somewhat off the beaten path.

When I finally decided that we could use space in the block with the Stratfield Hotel, I found that my problem had only begun. Sam Wheeler was always ready to talk with me—in fact he would talk by the hour—about everything except making that lease. Apparently he had his doubts about the success of the young Grant Company. Many months went by, during which I made almost countless trips to Bridgeport, before Mr. Wheeler finally agreed to give me a lease.

The chief handicap about this space was that the store had only a 13-foot ceiling. We could not spare an inch from the selling floor for the space we needed for an office, so we hung an office area from the ceiling by iron rods. It was only about six feet wide by 18 feet long and we had to crouch to move about in the office, but it served the purpose and still left the full floor area available for selling.

The store had a good-sized basement, two-thirds of which was used for selling purposes and one-third for stock.

As opening day for the new store drew near, we used every device for advance promotion that had been so successful in Waterbury. Again we covered our front windows with sheets of wrapping paper, painted with great question marks six feet high. Beside the question marks we lettered this sign: "A New Kind of Store—21 Departments—Nothing over 25¢—Watch for Sensational Opening."

I worked on the assumption that everybody for miles around was watching what I was doing. In

fact I was so excited with the prospect of opening a new store that I set out to make everyone else excited too.

Just across the street from our store was a restaurant where we occasionally dropped in to get a quick meal. The day after the window signs appeared, the proprietor asked me, "Why the big question marks? Are you wondering whether you are going to succeed?"

That anyone should doubt the success of what to me was the most wonderful store in the world was an outrageous reflection on our enterprise. Right then and there he lost our patronage. He got the answer to his question in dramatic terms when, a few days later, the store opened with a fanfare of excitement. The crowd was so great that traffic was blocked and we had to barricade the front entrance for the protection of our windows. Barricading the windows was originally done to attract attention, but in Bridgeport we discovered it was necessary to protect our windows and also to protect our customers from broken glass.

Bridgeport was almost within commuting distance of New York, only about 80 minutes by train, so we established it as our company headquarters. That little 6 × 18 office suspended from the ceiling became the General Offices of the W. T. Grant Company, with Maggie Walsh in charge. Maggie had come with me during the first year in the first store at Lynn, at a salary of $10 a week. She proved to be a wonder. She knew every phase and problem of the business. With her on the job, I felt that nothing could go wrong when I was away.

Bridgeport was a milestone in my personal life as well as in our business. It was there that I bought my first automobile. With three stores in operation, each with a manager, and with the eagle eye of Maggie Walsh surveying the entire three-store chain, I found it possible to cut down a little on the day-and-night work schedule I had followed for so many years. Putting it another way, I was able to live a somewhat more normal life. Near me lived Cleon Brownell, who was manager of our Bridgeport store. It took us about half an hour each way to make the trip by trolley.

Automobiles were coming into use and I was immensely intrigued with them. Often as Brownell and I were riding home on the trolley at evening, we would jealously eye some auto-owner on the road that paralleled the car tracks. There was no doubt about it—Brownell and I were nursing the same idea. If we had cars of our own, we would not be slaves of this trolley line; we could drive quickly back and forth between home and the store. We could go any time we wanted to—in short, we would be free! Free, also, to really enjoy long drives through the lovely Connecticut countryside on Sunday afternoons.

My choice was a Pierce-Arrow—a secondhand one, to be sure, for which, as I recall it, I paid $200. Brownell was so entranced by its appearance that he bought one just like it—for $175 at second hand. Our Pierce-Arrows had one-cylinder French engines mounted on the rear axle right on top of the differential. You hear people talk today about the simple logic of putting the engine at the rear of the car "where it belongs." We had engines at the rear—fifty years too soon!

Every moment that Brownell and I could spare on summer evenings and Sundays we tinkered with those cars. There were two problems, first to get one started, second to keep it running. If either of us went five miles without a breakdown, we had something to celebrate. For safety's sake we made the trip at the same time, so one could help the other on the road.

When we bought our chariots we had visions of sailing past that bumping trolley we had traveled so long, ignoring the motorman and conductor as we passed. But it didn't work out that way. More often we broke down on the way, only to have the trolley pull up along side, so that the passengers and crew could laugh and taunt us with the currently popular jest of "Get a horse!"

This happened so frequently that it no longer was amusing to us. We were not strangers any more. Finally one day we broke down just opposite a cemetery. When we saw the trolley coming we decided that we couldn't take the ridicule that was waiting for us. We hopped over the hedge into the cemetery and hid behind a couple of tombstones until our trolley friends had passed by!

But our adventures with automobiles were only an interlude in the expansion of the Grant chain.

Mr. Gammon never built a counter until Grants opened in Lewiston. This photo of the huge Gammon factory in Me. bears testimony to the fact that he built many since that time.

With the Bridgeport store in successful operation, we looked for a location for a fourth store and chose Lewiston, Maine. I selected this city because I knew it well from having operated a shoe store there for Jason S. Bailey and had a sentimental attachment for the community. In Lewiston I had many friends, knew the business people and hundreds of others who would be our customers. Under those circumstances I felt it would be much easier to get a store under way than in communities such as Waterbury and Bridgeport, where I had known so few people.

In Lewiston we had our first well-located store, a good large space with a 75-foot front. It presented only two problems; we had to dig a basement, and the roof was in such bad condition that it looked as though it might fall in.

In this connection I met Bill Gammon. I needed somebody to prop up that roof and it so happened that Gammon was the carpenter I got for the job. He did the job so well that I also had him build the fixtures for the store. Again he did such a splendid piece of work that I decided he was the man to build our fixtures. He has done so ever since. We have done many millions' worth of business with his firm. Although he has long since passed away, the business continues, now operated by his son-in-law.

Our fifth store was established in New Bedford, Massachusetts. Here the space we took had a wall running right down the middle of the store. Instead of removing the wall, we made two large openings through it, thus achieving a large main floor selling space without going to any great expense. The main floor was about 40 feet wide and 90 feet long. In order to get enough space to show our merchandise, I built the first mezzanine the company ever had. It was a small affair with an 18-inch wide stairway at each side, but it gave us some of the increased selling space we needed.

We now had five stores, all in Maine, Massachusetts and Connecticut. Up to this time we had never considered going outside the New England states, but repeated success prompted us to look toward wider horizons, even to dare to do something undreamed of a few years before. And this took us into a venture where we were to learn some new lessons for which we were scarcely prepared—our first store in New York City.

could feature in all our stores. Under this arrangement I never knew what Sam might bring in next. Each day held the promise of some surprise.

One day Sam achieved his masterpiece. He came puffing up the stairs and into my office, mopping his brow, and fairly trembling with excitement.

"Boss," he exclaimed, "this one is going to kill you. It's the most terrific buy I've ever made. You will never guess what I got!"

"O.K., Sam," I said. "Tell me about it."

But Sam was having trouble explaining his wonderful buy. He knew what he had bought but he didn't know how to pronounce it.

Finally he burst out, "So help me, boss, I just picked up ten thousand prostitutes at six and one-half cents each—they'll go like wildfire at ten cents apiece!"

Trying to keep a straight face, I asked Sam how big they were. He said: "They are all the same size, about eight by eleven. They are all bound in colors. And we take no risk, boss—if any are damaged in shipment they can be returned."

It turned out Sam had bought 10,000 passe partout framed pictures—pictures with glass in the front and a cardboard back, all bound round with colored adhesive tape. They were a popular novelty at the time, but not popular enough to excite our customers. It was several years before we saw the last of Sam's "prostitutes."

We had still another lesson to learn in those early days in New York. This one had to do with picking people for employment. Eventually we were to develop sound methods of selection and training, methods so well conceived and directed that they were to play a part of vast importance in the growth of our company.

But back there in those years I was floundering around trying to find some dependable way to select men for positions as assistant managers and managers. In that period, between 1910 and 1920, a woman by the name of Katherine Blackford had developed a method of aptitude analysis. She claimed that by analyzing the physical characteristics of people—the size and proportion of their facial features, their hands, their bodily structure, and their handwriting—she could tell the kind of work for which they were suited.

Her theories had a great vogue for several years and she was paid substantial fees by large corporations for her guidance in establishing examining methods in their personnel departments.

I was naturally interested in this development. Of course Katherine Blackford had hundreds of imitators and would-be imitators. Among them was a man who was capitalizing on the fad by giving lectures at the Y. M. C. A. not far from our New York store. Among other things, he professed to be something of a phrenologist, and using his charts he lectured to business groups, showing how the shape of a man's head determined his value as an employee. Very much intrigued by this man's theories, I decided we ought to try his services, so whenever I had a man under consideration for employment I would have him go over for an interview with Professor X. The professor would examine the prospect and then telephone me his opinion while the man was on his way back to our office.

At this time we decided it would be a good thing to have a small publication that could be issued regularly to the employees in our six stores. Among the applicants for this job was a man who had been with a large company in the Middle West. I sized him up, thought he was worth considering, and sent him over to Professor X.

Immediately after the interview the professor called me on the phone almost apoplectic with excitement. He said, "You have here a genius. Under no circumstances let him get away. He is exactly what you need for the editorial position, and his talents are so unusual that he should have a great future with your company."

Naturally this report excited me and I practically ran down to the front door to meet the man on his way back to my office. Of course we hired him immediately and put him to work—and soon found out that he was utterly unqualified for the job. In fact, he was one of the worst failures we ever employed. He had a way of selling himself so that he even sold Professor X, but he simply could not deliver on the job.

This experience rather dampened my enthusiasm for that type of "experts."

Out of those first few years in New York came several important conclusions. The opportunity for our type of store did not necessarily lay in the big cities, but in the many industrial cities throughout the country. That field was unlimited, and we had learned how to succeed there.

We were going to need more and more space for our general offices as the number of our stores increased, and those offices naturally belonged in New York. We must look for a new location where there would be room for expansion.

We had started with desk space in a building on Houston Street. Then, we had moved our office to the second floor over our store on Sixth Avenue —our first real New York office. Then to West 23rd Street, where the offices occupied the entire floor, running through to 22nd Street. This was, in fact our office, stockroom and shipping department combined. From there we moved to a location on Seventh Avenue, now part of the R. H. Macy store. In 1929 we moved to our present quarters at 1441 Broadway, where we occupy five floors and spill over onto two floors in two other nearby buildings.

But to get back to the early days, most important of all, as we grew we were going to need men—

and more men—men to develop as store managers, men as buyers, men to look after accounting, real estate and all the many departments into which our company was now dividing itself.

When I had one store it was a one-man business. When we had two, three, even four or five stores, it was still largely a matter of one-man buying and one-man management, and I had been that one. But now I realized that I had to both divide and multiply myself. I had to have help—men and women I could depend on, men and women with the talents, capacity and dependability to help our company grow, and to grow with it.

That is where many of you men and women who are today managing the Grant Company and operating its stores came into the story. In fact, the rest of the story—how our first early stores grew into today's chain of 521 Grant stores, with an organization of 25,000 fine people, serving more than a million customers every business day —is as well known to many of you as it is to me, for you have helped write it.

This photo marked the opening of our 500th Store. With occasions like this coming up, and with people like you surrounding me, do you wonder why I look forward to great years ahead?

Today we are all working together to build an even finer Grant business, profiting by our mistakes and building on our successes—as we have since the beginning.

I can't begin to tell you how proud I am of all of you who make up this wonderful organization, and how deeply I appreciate the help you have given me over the years in making my youthful dream of becoming a merchant come true.

As the weeks and months roll by, we are adding new chapters to the story—all of them interesting, some of them exciting. It will not be finished in the lifetime of us, but I take it that we are all having fun writing it. I know I am!

W. T. Grant

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